DOES DIVERSITY MATTER? ROBERT S. BOYNTON

The Nation.

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9/11
THE ROOTS OF PARANOIA
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EXCHANGE

R.O. BLECHMAN

If It's Broke, Fix It...

Ashland, Ore.

■ Katrina vanden Heuvel's "Bring Democracy Home" [Nov. 20] should be on the desk of every House and Senate member and every state government official and on the minds of every concerned citizen. It is time that citizens, rather than corporate toadies, determine the direction of our nation! A.C. GERMANN

Mackinaw City, Mich.

■ Katrina vanden Heuvel's ten suggestions for reforming our democracy are excellent. Let's consider one more, namely, a requirement that to win an election, one must receive a majority of the votes. If no candidate receives a majority in the first round, a runoff would take place—either a delayed runoff, as is done in many Latin American countries, or an instant runoff, like that in use in Vermont and San Francisco. Voters rank their candidates from first to last, and if no winner emerges in the first round, the voters whose first choice received the fewest votes have their second choice redistributed. This process continues until one candidate receives a majority (see www.instantrunoff.com). DAVID DWYER

Stony Brook, NY

■ Katrina vanden Heuvel's suggestion that instant-runoff voting will "end the duopoly" is wrong. The four countries that have used IRV for five or more years are two-party dominated in IRV seats (exactly why Australian third parties are trying to get rid of IRV). Fusion will not do so (it has been used in New York State since forever) and recently the "great white hope" Kevin Zeese ran for the Maryland Senate under the "revolutionary" new "fusion unity strategy" (Libertarian, Green and Populist) collecting... 1 percent of the vote. Vanden Heuvel's third suggestion (proportional representation) would indeed work, but its constitutionality is questionable, to say the least.

I recommend the simpler and better "range voting" system: Your vote is a score on a 0-to-9 scale for every candidate—highest average wins. It works on every voting machine now (no reprogramming needed); it should break the duopoly; it eliminates the "spoiler" effect; voting is never worse than not voting; and raising your score for somebody cannot hurt them (see http://RangeVoting.org). WARREN D. SMITH

Medford, Ore.

■ One important voting method was missing from Katrina vanden Heuvel's list: the one now used in (the ever-progressive state of) Oregon: Vote by Mail. No failing machines, mechanical or electronic; no waiting in line in the cold, the dark, the rain; no hanging chads! The polling place is the mailbox. If you procrastinate and don't make the mail in time, there are drop-off places. It's convenient, efficient, fraud-free and encourages getting out the vote.

JIM VERDIECK

Nashville

■ I suggest early voting. Here in Tennessee, polls were open for two weeks and 40 percent of voters voted before election day. I always think of the old bank jingle: "Daytime, nighttime, Saturday, too, we open our doors..." REBECCA LUXFORD

New York City

■ There is a puzzling omission from Katrina vanden Heuvel's admirable list of ideas. What about full voting rights for the residents of Washington, DC? PETER FRANCK

Cape May, NJ

■ Katrina vanden Heuvel ignored the biggest defect in our voting system: The candidate with the majority of votes can lose the election. Four times in our history, most recently in 2000, the candidate who won the popular vote lost the election. Ex-senators—Republican John Anderson of Illinois and Democrat Birch Bayh of Indiana—have placed an Every Vote Equal bill before each state. Should enough states (270 electoral votes' worth) sign on to this agreement, it would guarantee the candidate with the majority of the popular vote the presidency. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California recently vetoed the bill. He vetoed the basic rule of democracy: The majority rules.

ED POWICK

Deep Springs, Calif.

■ Costa Rica has a program where all children from 4 to 18 vote in a special uncounted election. They are taught to register and vote and to know where everything takes place. The election is held the same day as the national election, and the polling places for children are manned and administered by older children in the same facility as the adults. The result is that a high percentage of young citizens are deeply involved and vote when they turn 18.

F. ROSS PETERSON

Detroit

■ Having been with the Workers Party in Porto Alegre in October during the first round of Brazil's elections, I was very impressed with the level of political participation by citizens from all walks of life. That's because voting is held not only as a right but as a responsibility. Voting is mandatory; nonvoters lose government benefits. Brazilians are required to vote from age 16 to 60, when it becomes voluntary.

In addition, candidates who do not win a majority in the first round must campaign to win a runoff. This assures that the majority will be represented by those elected. Last, the entire country votes electronically without controversy. The results were announced within hours of the closing of the polls, without protest by any party. Multiple parties can compete without lesser parties marginalized to the role of "spoiler." The victory of the Brazilian Workers Party in electing a working-class president in 2002, repeated in 2006, could not have been possible otherwise. FRANK HAMMER

Highland Park, Ill.

■ I agree with the ten ideas for repairing our broken voting system, especially the election day holiday. This could be done by moving Columbus Day to election day. It would give people time to vote and free up computer-savvy people to serve as election judges. EDWARD L. KOVEN

Arcata, Calif.

■ Why do we carry on with a World War I artifact, Veteran's Day (November 11)? I say drop it. Most veterans—and I am one—care about Memorial Day. November 11 is a "mall" day off. We should exchange it for an election day holiday and *really* honor all the men and women who have helped make such a day possible. CATHERINE WALLING

Albany, NY

■ While I agree wholeheartedly with nine of Katrina vanden Heuvel's ten ideas, I don't think an election day holiday is a good one. So we add another paid holiday to the calendar of all the folks working in government, education, banks, etc. while the rest of us toiling in restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals or retail are burdened with one more day to worry about what to do with our kids on a day off from school. Now, in addition to finding time to vote, we have to work out the logistics of shuttling our children to daycare and opening our businesses for extra hours to service the lucky ones who have the day off. Why add another holiday we can't use? Longer polling-place hours would help, or mandating employers to allow their employees to arrive late or leave early on election day. With all types of work hours, I have never missed a vote. It's not a matter of finding time—it's a matter of wanting to vote. KEVIN B. KUHNE

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EDITORIALS

No Graceful Exit

George W. Bush is right about one thing with regard to the Iraq occupation: There will be no "graceful exit" from the disaster he has created. No matter when the last US troops leave the quagmire, there will be disorder and violence. But if the new Democratic Congress is serious about resolving the crisis, it will not embrace the "strategy" for reordering rather than ending the occupation being advanced by the Iraq Study Group. The November elections were a resounding popular consensus against the war and for an exit strategy, and yet unelected pundits and think tankers are already declaring that, as a recent *New York Times* article put it, "a major and rapid withdrawal seems to be fading as a viable option."

Democrats should not cede their popular mandate to the murky consensus of the Baker-Hamilton report, which equivocates on the alternative to prolonged war—speaking of "one last chance" to "succeed." Certainly, the panel's proposed gradual pullback of fifteen US combat brigades by early 2008 is a welcome alternative to the neocons' and Administration's failed and delusional policies. But there is no hard deadline attached to the recommendations; furthermore, the Iraq Study Group envisions keeping at least 70,000 troops in Iraq for the long term—maintaining a lower-visibility occupation rather than ending it. Even worse, it recommends "embedding" US troops with Iraqi units; in an environment where Iraqi army and police are increasingly identified with sectarian militias, this risks making US troops direct participants in Iraq's civil war—and what retired Lieut. Col. Ralph Peters called "hostages in uniform."

If the Democrats who take charge in January want to find good judgment and better alternatives, they should look to the many members of the party's House and Senate caucuses who voted in October 2002 against authorizing Bush to use force in Iraq. That includes the majority of House Democrats, among them incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the incoming chairs of several powerful committees. Almost half the Senate Democrats did the same. As Walter Pincus reported in the *Washington Post*—which gave scant coverage in 2002 to the prescient reasons provided by Democrats that fall for opposing the war—it is time to recognize that early opponents like Representative Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin "asked questions that are being widely considered today: 'Are we prepared to keep 100,000 or more troops in Iraq to maintain stability there?'"

While it is true that the Democratic leadership has yet to settle on a coherent exit strategy, many members have taken political risks to oppose the war from the start. And the positions for which they were once attacked are now becoming conventional wisdom. Indeed, the most valuable contributions of the Iraq Study Group report are its recognition that the situation in Iraq is "grave and deteriorating," that it is time to begin withdrawing at least some US troops, that the Bush Administration must engage Syria and Iran in regional talks on how to end the fighting and that any serious response to the region's challenges must include a renewed focus on establishing a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine.

By offering the prospect of some change, the Iraq Study Group report may well take the pressure off politicians to call for complete withdrawal before the 2008 presidential campaign. Citizens who seek a quicker timeline and a genuine military disengagement from Iraq must make their voices heard if US policy is to move beyond the half-measures set out by the panel.

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COMMENT

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The Other Lieberman

When the Galilee town of Sakhnin's predominantly Arab soccer team was awarded the Israel Cup in 2004, Avigdor Lieberman was not in the mood to bestow congratulations. Instead, Lieberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Is Our Home) party, implied in a newspaper interview that the team, Hapoel Bnei Sakhnin, would one day be expelled from Israel to the West Bank. "Sakhnin will not play in the Israeli league and will represent the other [Palestinian] league. They may even call it Hapoel Shechem [Nablus]," Lieberman joked.

Far from his nakedly anti-Arab approach disqualifying him from the political mainstream, Lieberman is today its rising star. He was welcomed into the ruling coalition in October as "minister for strategic threats" and is now the main ally and crutch of faltering Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Lieberman is stoking anti-Arab sentiment and exploiting insecurity and disillusionment after the fiasco of last summer's Lebanon war. Top office, or at least the Defense Ministry, is a realistic goal for Lieberman, a shrewd political tactician who helped Benjamin Netanyahu gain election as Prime Minister in 1996 and served in Ariel Sharon's Cabinet. "If elections were held now, based on the polls, he could presumably be either prime minister or demand any other ministry he wanted," says Yossi Alpher, former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. If Lieberman's pronouncements are to be taken seriously—and there is no obvious reason they should not be—a Lieberman government would exclude some Arab citizens from Israel, would expel others who refuse to sign a loyalty-to-Zionism oath and would execute Arab members of the Knesset who talk to Hamas.

Many Israelis—and many Americans—are sleeping through Lieberman's rise, but there have been voices of alarm. The daily *Ha'aretz* warned that the appointment of the "unrestrained and irresponsible" Lieberman "constitutes a strategic threat in its own right," and Hebrew University political scientist Ze'ev Sternhell says, "Lieberman is perhaps the most dangerous politician in the history of the State of Israel." Sternhell believes Lieberman poses a greater threat to democracy than previous far-right politicians because Lieberman has not been confined to the margins and because "he has a genuine social power base among the Russian immigrants and in the lower middle class among people who think the Knesset and Supreme Court have too much power."

Like Hamas, which swept the Palestinian elections last January, Lieberman, though striving for power through the ballot box, believes democracy is at best a secondary value. In a September interview he said: "The vision I would like to see here is the entrenching of the Jewish and the Zionist state. I very much favor democracy, but when there is a contradiction between democratic and Jewish values, the Jewish and Zionist values are more important."

Lieberman has no tolerance for pluralism. In one of his first pronouncements as minister, he called for making Israel "as much as possible" a homogeneous Jewish state. His party's platform includes a plan under which some Arab areas of Israel would be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, albeit without consulting

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the Arab citizens. "In exchange" Israel would annex large West Bank settlements. In his book *My Truth*, Lieberman argues that the Arab minority poses the greatest threat to Israel's future. His platform could be used to disenfranchise the Arab minority, now one-fifth of the population, or pave the way for its expulsion.

Along with Netanyahu, Lieberman is the prime beneficiary of the sea change in Israeli politics after the Lebanon war. Israel's leaders rushed into the conflict without weighing alternatives and showed a disregard for the lives of Lebanese civilians and even their own soldiers. Most Israelis cannot forgive Olmert or the hapless Defense Minister Amir Peretz—who just a year ago was the great new progressive hope of the Labor Party—for their inept handling of the campaign. In political terms, the major casualty of the war was Olmert's "convergence" plan to unilaterally withdraw from isolated West Bank settlements while annexing large settlement blocs. Olmert now has a void instead of an agenda. The entire power structure has been discredited—but not Lieberman, who was not associated with the Lebanon debacle and who unabashedly adheres to the same stances he held in opposition.

With no background in security and a record of threats against other countries, Lieberman is an unlikely choice for handling Israel's strategic challenges, including how to deal with Iran. But for Olmert, it seems, Israeli security comes second to political expediency. "What totally disgusts me is the fact that Olmert saw fit to create a security ministry for a man who is a security liability for Israel. He is prepared to use Israeli security as a political goodie," says the Jaffee Center's Alpher.

Democracy is also for sale in Olmert's Israel. Legislation Lieberman has prepared, for which Olmert mustered Cabinet approval, would transfer many of the Knesset's powers to the prime minister—powers that will be in Lieberman's hands if he is elected. The plan does away with no-confidence votes, calls for direct election of the prime minister and allows the prime minister to appoint a Cabinet without Knesset approval. The prime minister would not have to wait for Cabinet or parliamentary approval to promulgate emergency regulations that could overturn existing laws. "Lieberman wants a Putin-style regime here," says Tel Aviv University political scientist Yoav Peled. "I don't think it can happen under the current government, but it's very significant, because this is the plan he will implement when he has the power. And pretty soon he will have the power."

BEN LYNFIELD

Ben Lynfield writes for the Scotsman. *During fourteen years in the Middle East, he has covered seven Israeli governments and both intifadas.*

Latin Left Turn

His opponent cast him as a Latin American strongman, a Fidelista intent on stifling freedom, instigating violence and decimating the Venezuelan economy. But once again, Hugo Chávez has won the presidency of Venezuela by a landslide, confirming not only his local popularity but the decisive shift to the left in the region—and decidedly away from US influence.

This time Chávez faced down Manuel Rosales, a cattle rancher and state governor who repeatedly claimed the popular president would lead Venezuela toward Cuban-style autocratic rule. His pleas were unconvincing: With 78 percent of the polls reporting, Chávez won on Sunday with 61 percent of the vote, in contrast to Rosales's 38 percent.

Of course, Chávez is famous for his own overstatements. He's deemed George W. Bush "the devil" and Cuba's single-party system a "revolutionary democracy," adding that his latest victory will be dedicated to its ailing leader, Fidel Castro.

But Chávez won not for his admiration of Castro nor for his hostility toward the Bush Administration. He won because for the past eight years he's presided over a robust economy that's invested a large chunk of its revenues in raising the living conditions of the poor. Since taking office, Chávez has spent billions on his "Bolivarian Revolution," improving healthcare and education, offering subsidized food and fuel, raising cash benefits for single mothers, offering low-interest loans for small businesses and on occasion even transforming massive ranches and sugar plantations into worker-owned cooperatives. Those policies have insured his successive re-elections despite an attempted coup, a recall referendum and a massive oil strike designed to oust him from office. As was obvious from the boisterous support for Chávez at demonstrations in Caracas before Sunday's election, Venezuela's poor revere him. "Chávez was sent here by God," 41-year-old Rosa Gonzalez told the Associated Press.

Chávez's success has reverberated beyond Venezuela. In recent years he's helped sweep other left-leaning leaders in the region to power: Lula in Brazil, Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, Evo Morales in Bolivia and, most recently, Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Like Chávez, Correa has been harshly critical of Bush—he's publicly called Bush a "dimwit"—and he promised to renegotiate Ecuador's contracts with foreign oil companies to give the state a larger share of the profits. Correa has also pledged to restructure the country's debt to leave more money to invest in the poor, oppose a free-trade deal with the United States and close the last US military base in South America. Correa's victory in a runoff election confirmed popular support for those policies and dealt a major blow to Bush Administration hopes of bolstering its waning influence in the region. It also represents a sharp rebuke to the multinational oil companies that operate in Ecuador, which are widely reviled for reaping huge profits while contaminating the country's once-pristine rainforest and devastating its indigenous culture.

But most broadly, the elections of Chávez and Correa, and even the recent election of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega to lead Nicaragua, signal a growing disillusionment in Latin America with neoliberal economic policies championed by the United States, the World Bank and the IMF since the mid-1980s. That "Washington Consensus" favored wide-open markets, drastically reduced spending and privatized industry, and it coincided with the lowest economic growth in more than a century. Today, one in four Latin Americans still lives on less than $2 a day.

So, does the leftward turn in Latin America presage the revival of autocratic rule and the end of capitalism there, as many of its critics suggest? Hardly. To be sure, Chávez has enacted some troubling restrictions on free expression, such as a little-enforced law that criminalizes insults to the president or other government officials. But neighboring countries have recently repealed

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such laws, suggesting Chávez isn't starting any broad repressive trends. And despite the alarm bells, Venezuela still has a vigorous press—much of it owned by Chávez's vocal opposition.

Meanwhile, capitalism remains alive and well in Venezuela. Indeed, despite what Chávez has branded "21st Century Socialism," Venezuela's elite are only getting richer. Banks and credit card companies report huge increases in deposits and loans. The stock exchange has risen almost 130 percent this year and overall economic growth is expected to exceed 10 percent, giving Venezuela the highest growth rate in the Americas. And, although financial analysts complained when Chávez forced foreign oil companies to pay back taxes and higher royalties, he has retained an open-market system that allows them to continue to earn huge profits. Not exactly signs of Cuban-style socialism.

Chávez's actions have encouraged neighboring leaders to take similar measures. In Bolivia Evo Morales, elected president last year by a historic margin after pledging to "reclaim" the country's natural gas, has forced companies to renegotiate contracts so that Bolivia will keep between 50 and 80 percent of the profits rather than the measly 18 percent it was getting. Ecuador's new president has promised to do the same with his country's oil industry.

Despite Chávez's fiery talk of socialism, his policies so far have been more reformist than revolutionary. As Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has noted, "The private sector is actually a larger share of the Venezuelan economy today than it was before Chávez took office."

Critics warn that Chávez and his disciples are merely riding the wave of high oil prices. That's a danger for any economy that depends on selling natural resources. But the government's investments in education, healthcare, small businesses and cooperatives are the sort of spending that has long-term payoffs. If oil prices were to decline suddenly—unlikely, but always possible—Venezuelans would still be better off than they were before.

In the United States, left-leaning leaders like Chávez are easily dismissed as "populists," as if representing the interests of the majority were inherently deserving of scorn. That may say more about how little we've come to expect from our own elected representatives than about the legitimacy of the new wave of democratic leaders in Latin America. DAPHNE EVIATAR

Daphne Eviatar has written widely about oil, politics and development. Last year she reported from Bolivia and Ecuador for The Nation.

CALVIN TRILLIN

On the Iraq Memo Donald Rumsfeld Wrote as He Was About to Be Fired

So who among us ever could have known
That Rumsfeld, who in public's always shown
Such confidence that triumph was for sure,
Could, in his private heart of hearts, abjure
This policy with which he'd been entrusted
And say it'd busted and must be adjusted?

And who among us ever could have dreamt
That notions Rumsfeld treated with contempt—
Like pulling back our troops to, say, Kuwait,
A plan he called unworthy of debate—
Would be among the options he'd present
To George Bush in this memo that he sent?

And who among us possibly can tell
If this man who tried desperately to sell
This war was simply faking all these years
Or now is faking so that it appears
He wasn't such a zealot after all
And shouldn't be the one to take the fall?

There isn't any way of knowing,
But either way we're glad he's going.

Brady Kiesling's Tale

In January 2003 John Brady Kiesling, political counselor at the US Embassy in Greece, hosted a dinner party for a dozen European artists and intellectuals at his apartment in Athens. Most of the guests were friendly to the United States, but none of them could fathom the Bush Administration's inexorable march to war in Iraq. As a career diplomat obligated to defend his country's foreign policy, Kiesling reflexively counterattacked with prowar arguments, but the rhetorical effort left him exhausted and irritable. "At the end of the evening," he later explained, "I realized how threadbare and unconvincing my arguments had been. And these were people who like Americans!"

A few weeks later Kiesling resigned from the State Department. "Our fervent pursuit of war with Iraq," he wrote in an eloquent letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell, "is driving us to squander the international legitimacy that has been America's most potent weapon of both offense and defense since the days of Woodrow Wilson." That letter turned Kiesling into an antiwar celebrity and brought him an admiring handwritten note from Bill Clinton.

"My personality," Kiesling says with a wan smile, "is not really that suited to going out and being a rock star." That's true: He has none of the swagger and charisma we tend to associate with whistleblowers and mavericks like Daniel Ellsberg and Joseph Wilson. With his light blue button-down shirt, khaki pants, black loafers and round glasses, Kiesling, youthful at 49, carries himself like an assistant professor of English or an earnest young librarian. One senses a steeliness in him, but also a sense of fragility. Did he make the correct decision to terminate his twenty-year career in the foreign service? "Yes, I'm much happier now," he responds

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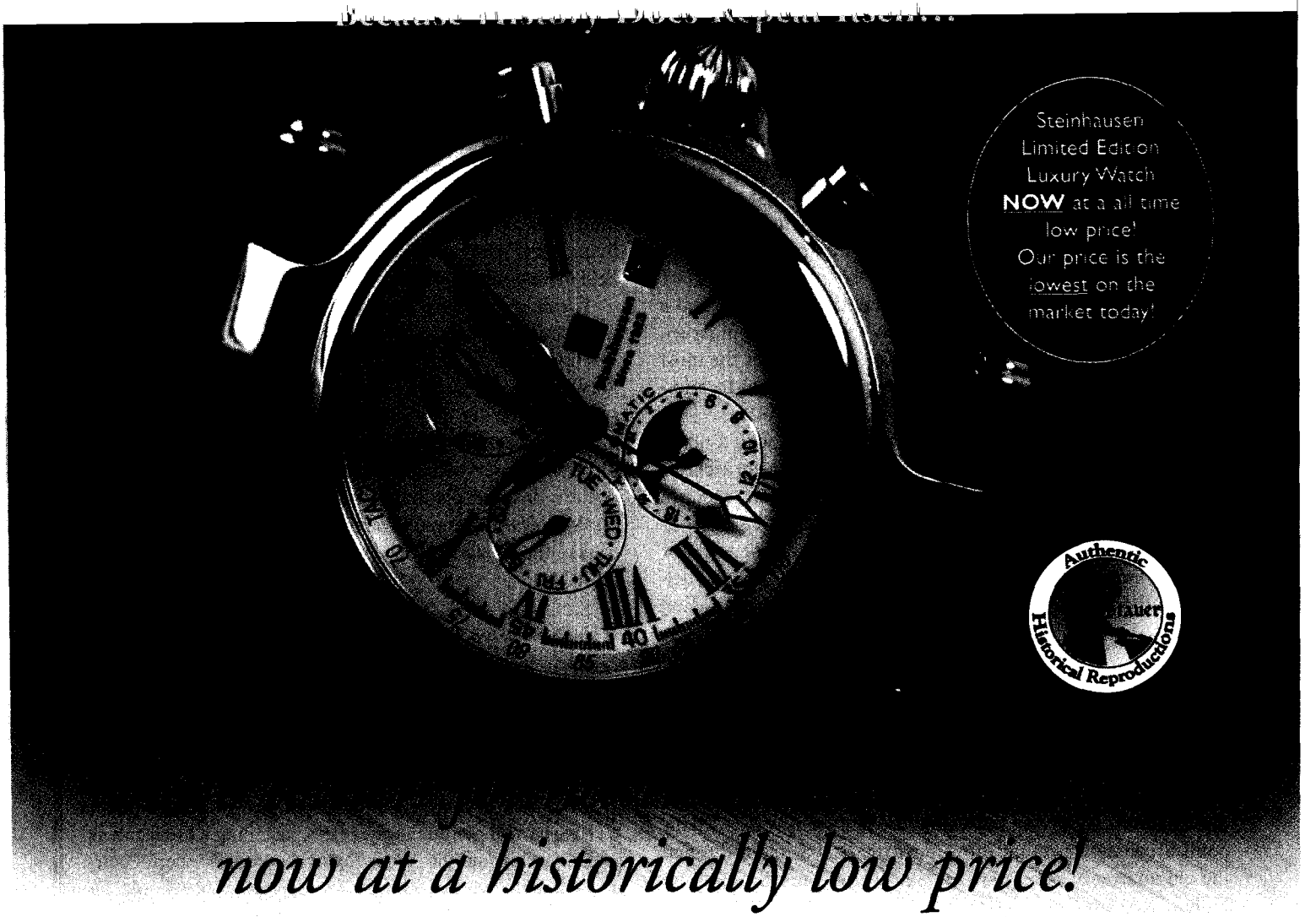

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without hesitation. "Everyone has to punch some ticket in life that says they have made a difference."

Kiesling was recently in New York City to promote his new book, *Diplomacy Lessons*, and I met him at an apartment across from Washington Square Park, where he was staying with an old friend. *Diplomacy Lessons* is three things: an autopsy of the Bush Administration's foreign policy by a man whose job was to help implement it; a primer on the art (and necessity) of first-rate diplomacy in an era of unilateral gunslinging; and a memoir of Kiesling's years as a foreign service officer in Israel, Armenia, Morocco and Greece, the country he loves the most and the place he now calls home. The pages devoted to Kiesling's career are among the most gripping in the book.

In those pages, we see an idealistic young man, with a newly minted graduate degree from Berkeley in Mediterranean archeology and ancient history, who took the foreign service exam in 1983. We see a hapless diplomat in Morocco who, with the best of intentions, once tried to broker a deal between a restless neighbor (a proud, impoverished Islamic university student) and a US intelligence officer, a deal that quickly collapsed. We see him gaining confidence as a junior diplomat: schmoozing with power brokers and literati, scanning the Greek press for political minutiae and making the long drive every few months to the headquarters of the Communist Party of Greece, where, near a huge bust of Lenin, he would spend an hour arguing with the Politburo member in charge of international relations.

And finally we witness his growing disillusionment with US diplomacy after 9/11 and the ways those sentiments expanded his political consciousness and drove him to despair. Strolling through the old quarter of Ankara in the weeks after the US assault on Falluja, Kiesling saw signs in tourist shops that read "Americans Not Welcome." In light of these and other incidents, some old shibboleths in his mind began to crumble. In 2001 he smugly assured the publisher of a left-wing newspaper in Athens that Noam Chomsky was "clinically insane." Writes Kiesling in his new book, "I feel more charitably disposed toward Chomsky now."

It wasn't principle alone that inspired Kiesling's act of rebellion. *Diplomacy Lessons* chronicles the administrative and bureaucratic imbroglios that preceded his decision to resign. It's a tangled and psychologically complex story. In 2002 Kiesling ran into difficulty with the diplomatic security division of the Embassy in Athens, which routinely sends young Marines to offices after hours in search of unsecured classified material. If an unsecured document is located, a pink slip is deposited. Kiesling's pink slips began to proliferate, and he was informed that he was ineligible for promotion for one year. "Almost certainly," he writes, "the lapses were my fault, the result of working too late with too little sleep." But he also felt he was being punished arbitrarily. "Every political officer who actually does any work runs afoul of this system once or twice," he says now. When he sought the support of his Ambassador, Thomas Miller, and was rebuffed, Kiesling felt he no longer had "absolute faith in the integrity of the system I worked for." His anger toward Miller, combined with the queasiness he felt about the imminent war in Iraq, gave him the courage to resign, he says.

Doing so meant sacrificing a steady career. With his savings depleted, he is scrambling to build a new life for himself, writing for an English-language Athens newspaper and researching a book about the November 17 organization—a "little tiny terrorist group," he relates, "that for twenty-five years tied the US government in knots in Greece." Eventually he would like to support himself as a freelance writer in Greece, where he says the cost of living is less than in the United States and where he appears to be held in high esteem, but his anxiety about the future is palpable.

Kiesling may have lost faith in the Bush-era State Department, but he remains idealistic about the diplomatic profession. His book is dedicated to "the new generation of the US Foreign Service, whose faith in their country and curiosity about the planet will bring new pride to a proud profession." Already he's in contact with that new generation. "I recruited a couple of potential new foreign service officers on my book tour these last few days," explains Kiesling. "A really bright guy working on War News Radio at Swarthmore College now says he wants to take the foreign service exam and he e-mailed me on how to do it."

SCOTT SHERMAN

Scott Sherman is a Nation *contributing writer.*

NATION NOTE

We are sad to announce the departure of Grace Schulman, poetry editor of *The Nation* since 1972, who is stepping down to devote more time to her writing. Grace's poems have earned her numerous prizes, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Aiken Taylor Award in Modern Poetry. Like many readers, we look forward to her new book, *The Broken String*, which will appear this spring. Meanwhile, we honor Grace for her remarkable service to the magazine, which has been greatly enriched by her blend of passion and discernment and by her unfailing kindness and, yes, graciousness. During her tenure, *The Nation* has published poems by Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott, James Wright, Mona Van Duyn, Louise Glück, Pablo Neruda, James Merrill and A.R. Ammons, as well as work by many emerging poets who later achieved wider recognition. Grace's own essays and reviews have appeared here as well. Fortunately, she will not be leaving us altogether: Grace will continue to judge the poetry contest Discovery–*The Nation*, which she founded in 1973. A big thanks from all of us, Grace.

Assuming Grace's duties as poetry editor will be John Palattella, who has been writing about poetry for *The Nation* since 2002. John's essays have appeared in many other publications, including *The London Review of Books*, *Boston Review* and *Bookforum*. Writing on an impressive range of subjects, from French Surrealism to the Lower East Side avant-garde, from the Brooklyn waterfront to the jazz-inflected verse of Nathaniel Mackey, John has displayed great gifts as a critic—sensitivity to form, historical erudition and a refusal of the provincial dogmas that so often balkanize the small world of poetry. We believe these qualities will also stand him in good stead as our poetry editor.

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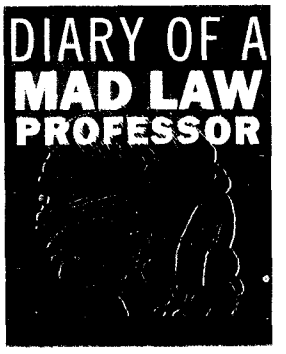
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

America to Me



"With the feminists, the homosexual groups, the other interest groups, you put it all together with the black interest groups, and it does not look like America," says Richard Viguerie, referring to the Democratic Party. It's an interesting question at this moment in history, the little matter of what America looks like. If one pursues Mr. Viguerie's point to its logical end, "real" Americans must be male and straight and white and not especially interested in any "other" group (except, presumably, Mr. Viguerie's own ConservativeHQ). This division between supposedly authentic Americans and those "others" is, according to a report in the *New York Times*, the new but ever-so-old line henceforth to be "pounded" into the media by certain Republican strategists, of whom Viguerie is a prime player. The Democratic Party is to be figured as a ghetto of women, wusses and macaca-lovers. Republicans are straight arrows whose manly brows glisten with the pale dew of impartiality.

At the same time, Viguerie insists that this is not about race or gender. He's just against "special interests." If you are so crass as to think it's about prejudice, well, that's just because you're one of those annoying people who see isms under every rock. This rhetorical spinmanship is ubiquitous right now. Everywhere, there are protestations of high-mindedness while embracing the de facto resegregation of this entire nation. It can be seen in the endlessly reductive discussions about the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, an anti–affirmative action measure voters endorsed in the last election. Like the one passed in California some years ago, it eliminates not just affirmative action but all mention of race in most every publicly funded arena, for any purpose including remediation (except law enforcement—got to leave that window for police profiling). It even bars collection of demographic data involving housing, health and schools. Talk about killing the messenger. Ward Connerly, lead architect of the initiative, is a black man himself, and so, the argument goes, how on earth could the initiative be bad for black people? Don't you like black men? And what an exceptional black man he is! When the Ku Klux Klan formally endorsed the initiative, Connerly returned the embrace: "If the Ku Klux Klan thinks that equality is right, God bless them. Thank them for finally reaching the point where logic and reason are being applied, instead of hate."

What a bridge-builder, that Connerly.

Of a piece with this is a cluster of school integration cases just argued before the Supreme Court. The plaintiffs are white parents who have challenged the constitutionality of voluntary integration plans in Seattle and Louisville. The plans in question are representative of those implemented in hundreds of other school districts around the country, so the ruling will have enormous impact. Based on questions asked by the Justices, most observers agree that the new conservative majority seems likely to rule that integrating public schools, even voluntarily, is no different from intentional segregation and therefore should be struck down. "Try to understand it as an extension of the reasoning in *Brown v. Board of Education*," says one of my loopier friends. "You'll just get all weepy if you think of it as outright reversal."

It's odd, this parallel universe of equal opportunity "logic," this refusal to remediate as itself the new remediation. The statistics indicating our growing social divisions are horrific and bode ill for what this country will look like in the future. Yet in the mainstream public imagination, integration is the same as segregation. Speaking about race is exactly the same as racism. When Ward Connerly endorses the Ku Klux Klan as the poster child for the spirit of Kumbaya, it's an exciting new brand of coalition politics. When, in New York City, three unarmed black men are wounded, one fatally, by fifty rounds of police gunfire, we're supposed to look on the bright side: It's not racism! One of the five officers involved was black! What a relief!

Then there was Bill Montgomery's successful bid for Attorney General in Arizona. During the campaign, he was accused of hiring undocumented immigrants to play the part of, um, undocumented immigrants for a political advertisement decrying the flood of, yes, undocumented immigrants crossing the border to take away "our" jobs. Montgomery was shocked and a tad injured that anyone would find either hypocrisy or irony in the situation: "It simply did not cross my mind to interrogate anyone who had a skin shade darker than mine while I was shooting video."

There is some strong element of mental dissociation in all this. I suppose one could call it a failure to take responsibility. Perhaps, as with Richard Viguerie, one may hazard a guess that it's calculated. Still, there's a weird disembodiment to it, exemplified by comedian Michael Richards's and actor Mel Gibson's disclaimers in the wake of their viciously racist and anti-Semitic diatribes: They just didn't know where it came from. Something came over them. They channeled it. It seized them out of nowhere. Demons rose from the ground and possessed them.

This is either outright mental illness or something just a hair shy of O.J. Simpson's taunt, "If I did it." Even if we Americans are as colorblind as we profess, even if we are as racially innocent as the driven snow and if indeed our only problem is the occasional moment of temporary insanity when cops, comedians and Connerlys are suddenly attacked by rogue racist spirits roiling in the collective unconscious, then we still may want to pause to absorb and mourn the statistical mischief they make in the material world.

These musings bring me back to Richard Viguerie's hypothesis about what America "looks" like in the year 2006. I can't help thinking of Frank Sinatra, who, in 1945, sang Abel Meeropol's song "The House I Live In" in a short patriotic film of the same name. The movie studio excised the second verse: "The house I live in/A plot of earth, a street,/The grocer and the butcher,/Or the people that I meet;/The children in the playground,/The faces that I see,/All races and religions,/That's America to me." It was much too controversial. ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Point, No Counterpoint: The Conservative Beat

When, in January 2004, the *New York Times* announced its new "conservative beat," the most common reaction was bemusement. "The conservatives thought it was patronizing," executive editor Bill Keller told Byron Calame, the paper's public editor, and "the Democrats thought it was pandering."

It was probably just a slip of the tongue, but an interesting one nevertheless, that led Keller to counterpoise "conservatives" with "Democrats" rather than "liberals." After all, no Democrat running for national office has admitted to being a "liberal" in decades. Some claim to be "conservative." Others prefer "populist." Almost all of them claim to be "progressive," but they usually preface this with another word, like "pragmatic," lest it open up unwanted vulnerabilities. "Liberals" are off the map, except as an epithet.

To much of the media, there are only two sides to any debate: the "conservative" side and everybody else. Because so-called conservatives these days get their policy instructions largely from big business, fundamentalist Christians and a small coterie of neoconservative ideologues, this Manichean tendency ignores progressives whose views extend beyond the simple "not crazy" response inspired by so much of the Bush agenda. If you simply accept the scientific data on global warming or stem-cell research, you're a liberal. If you think there's something odd about tax cuts that undermine our fiscal future and give the lion's share of benefits to the over-class at a time of exploding economic inequality, you're a liberal. If three years ago you insisted on evidence of a genuine threat, either past or future, from the nation you were about to invade... Well, you get the point. Genuinely liberal alternatives to these nutty notions rarely merit a mention.

Some right-wingers have professed discomfort about the *Times*'s conservative beat. *Weekly Standard* editors complain that the reporters' focus was largely on "issues that divide conservatives from the Bush White House.... From Paul Krugman on down, the *Times* offers its readers an extensive array of Bush-bashing features. The 'conservative beat' is simply a clever new addition to this menu." The *Wall Street Journal*'s Paul Gigot also said he thought the beat unnecessary. "Maybe they could save time and read us," he quipped. "Cut out the middleman." There has been some liberal grumbling as well. Jamison Foser, my colleague at Media Matters for America, complains that the beat skews coverage against progressives. He offers an example: a story about a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage that detailed support for the amendment from religious conservatives but ignored the fact that ten times as many religious leaders had signed a letter in support of same-sex marriage.

Even granting Foser's complaint—and I do—it would be crazy to argue that the world would somehow be better off with less information about the right-wingers who run so much of our government and media. The paper's resources are unequaled, and reporters David Kirkpatrick and Jason DeParle have produced thoughtful, illuminating stories that have significantly improved our understanding of the movement and its component parts. For instance, DeParle traveled from Kentucky to Kenya to investigate the incredible global influence of a tiny think tank called the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, Michigan, and its guiding spirit, Lawrence Reed (he "was a high school sophomore when he burned his first Soviet flag").

But in chartering a conservative beat while refusing to consider an analogous one on liberal activists, intellectuals and organizations, the *Times* perpetuates a number of stereotypes that do more to confuse than to illuminate. Set aside, for a moment, that while the movement upon which the beat focuses may be extremely right wing, it does not deserve the moniker "conservative." As one of the paper's correspondents to Calame's column pointed out, "A conservative to me is a fiscal conservative who believes in prudent financial management and a social conservative who advocates caution in making changes to longstanding societal arrangements." None of these apply to America's right-wingers today.

No less important, the focus on only the right appears to reaffirm the powerful myth that the rest of the paper is sufficiently "liberal" to have that end of things covered. According to Calame, this decision merely "reflected the reality that *The Times*'s coverage of liberals had no gaps similar to those in its reporting on the conservative movement." Once again, this "reality" is hardly apparent to this liberal. Had the *Times*, for instance, paid more attention to what genuine liberals were saying four years ago, it would not have allowed its reporters to be sucked into the vortex of lies spun by the Bush Administration, which have embroiled this country in a ruinous war.

A strong case can be made that while the paper's editorial page has been liberal of late, and while most *Times* employees are probably sympathetic to gay marriage, reproductive choice and the like, the paper's political coverage is actually driven by the far-right's agenda, as expressed by both the Bush Administration and the punditocracy. Liberal ideas, initiatives and organizations are, in fact, the ones that have been given short shrift in the current political environment. The work of many fine institutions and individuals is viewed exclusively through the prism of partisanship rather than considered respectfully as a matter of policy and the world of ideas—as both Kirkpatrick and DeParle honored their subjects. This is but one of many reasons, no doubt, why America's political discourse is located in a territory so far rightward it could barely be contained on the political map of any other industrialized democracy.

The word in Times Square is that now that the right-wingers appear to have played themselves out, the paper will probably fold its coverage of them into its larger political coverage. That would be a pity. The kind of coverage the beat has so far offered is available nowhere else in the mainstream media. What is needed is more of it—expanded to embrace liberal movements, organizations and thinkers—not less. ■

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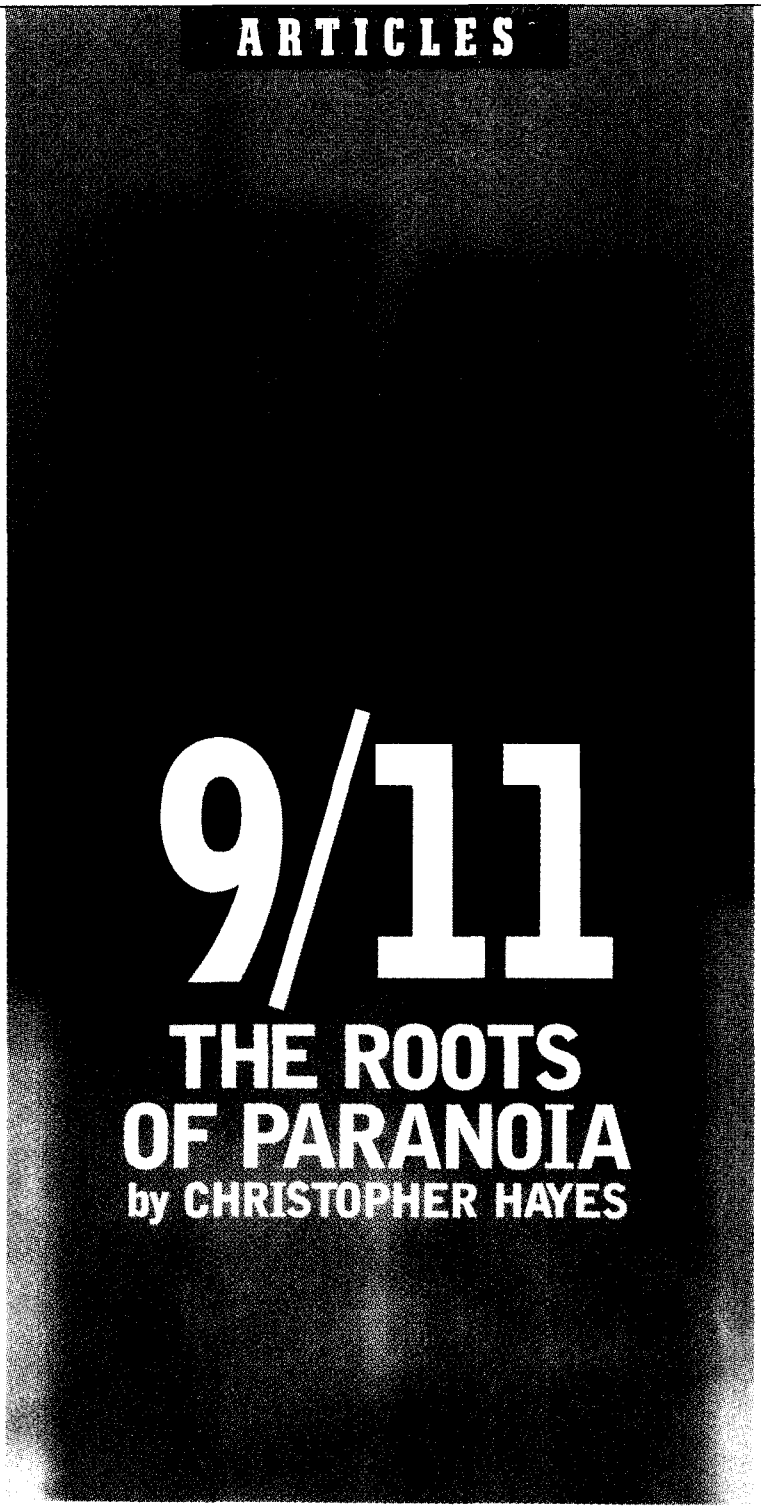
ARTICLES



According to a July poll conducted by Scripps News Service, one-third of Americans think the government either carried out the 9/11 attacks or intentionally allowed them to happen in order to provide a pretext for war in the Middle East. This is at once alarming and unsurprising. Alarming, because if tens of millions of Americans really believe their government was complicit in the murder of 3,000 of their fellow citizens, they seem remarkably sanguine about this fact. By and large, life continues as before, even though tens of millions of people apparently believe they are being governed by mass murderers. Unsurprising, because the government these Americans suspect of complicity in 9/11 has acquired a justified reputation for deception: weapons of mass destruction, secret prisons, illegal wiretapping. What else are they hiding?

This pattern of deception has not only fed diffuse public cynicism but has provided an opening for alternate theories of 9/11 to flourish. As these theories—propounded by the so-called 9/11 Truth Movement—seep toward the edges of the mainstream, they have raised the specter of the return (if it ever left) of what Richard Hofstadter famously described as "the paranoid style in American politics." But the real danger posed by the Truth Movement isn't paranoia. Rather, the danger is that it will discredit and deform the salutary skepticism Americans increasingly show toward their leaders.

The Truth Movement's recent growth can be largely attributed to the Internet-distributed documentary *Loose Change*. A low-budget film produced by two 20-somethings that purports to debunk the official story of 9/11, it's been viewed over the Internet millions of times. Complementing *Loose Change* are the more highbrow offerings of a handful of writers and scholars, many of whom are associated with Scholars for 9/11 Truth. Two of these academics, retired theologian David Ray Griffin and retired Brigham Young University physics professor Steven Jones, have written books and articles that serve as the movement's canon. Videos of their lectures circulate among the burgeoning portions of the Internet devoted to the cause of the "truthers." A variety of groups have chapters across the country and organize conferences that draw hundreds. In the last election cycle, the website www.911truth.org even produced a questionnaire with pointed inquiries for candidates, just like the US Chamber of Commerce or the Sierra Club. The Truth Movement's relationship to the truth may be tenuous, but that it is a movement is no longer in doubt.

Truth activists often maintain they are simply "raising questions," and as such tend to focus with dogged persistence on physical minutiae: the lampposts near the Pentagon that should have been knocked down by Flight 77, the altitude in Pennsylvania at which cellphones on Flight 93 should have stopped working, the temperature at which jet fuel burns and at which steel melts. They then use these perceived inconsistencies to argue that the central events of 9/11—the plane hitting the Pentagon, the towers collapsing—were not what they appeared to be. So: The eyewitness accounts of those who heard explosions in the World Trade Center, combined with the facts that jet fuel burns at 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit and steel melts at 2,500, shows that the towers were brought down by controlled explosions from inside the buildings, not by the planes crashing into them.

If the official story is wrong, then what did happen? As you might expect, there's quite a bit of dissension on this point. Like any movement, the Truth Movement is beset by internecine fights

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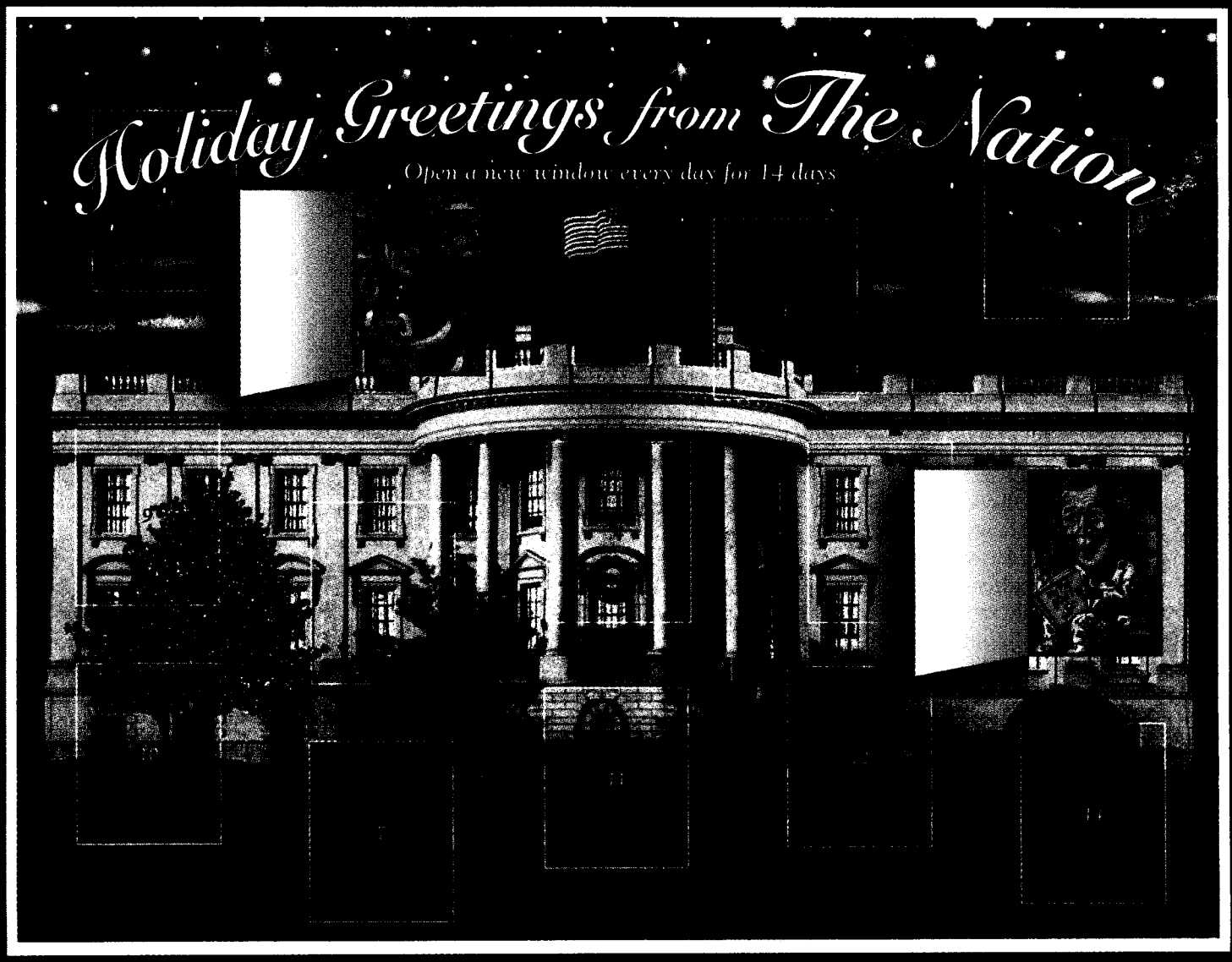

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between different factions: those who subscribe to what are termed LIHOP theories (that the government "let it happen on purpose") and the more radical MIHOP ("made it happen on purpose") contingent. Even within these groups, there are divisions: Some believe the WTC was detonated with explosives after the planes hit and some don't even think there were any planes.

To the extent that there is a unified theory of the nature of the conspiracy, it is based, in part, on the precedent of the Reichstag fire in Germany in the 1930s. The idea is that just as the Nazis staged a fire in the Reichstag in order to frighten the populace and consolidate power, the Bush Administration, military contractors, oil barons and the CIA staged 9/11 so as to provide cause and latitude to pursue its imperial ambitions unfettered by dissent and criticism. But the example of the Reichstag fire itself is instructive. While during and after the war many observers, including officials of the US government, suspected the fire was a Nazi plot, the consensus among historians is that it was, in fact, the product of a lone zealous anarchist. That fact changes little about the Nazi regime, or its use of the fire for its own ends. It's true the Nazis were the chief beneficiaries of the fire, but that doesn't mean they started it, and the same goes for the Bush Administration and 9/11.

Critics lament the resurgence of the 'paranoid style,' but it has taken root because of the lack of skepticism by the establishment press.

The Reichstag example also holds a lesson for those who would dismiss the very notion of a conspiracy as necessarily absurd. It was perfectly reasonable to suspect the Nazis of setting the fire, so long as the evidence suggested that might have been the case. The problem isn't with conspiracy theories as such; the problem is continuing to assert the existence of a conspiracy even after the evidence shows it to be virtually impossible.

In March 2005 *Popular Mechanics* assembled a team of engineers, physicists, flight experts and the like to critically examine some of the Truth Movement's most common claims. They found them almost entirely without merit. To pick just one example, steel might not melt at 1,500 degrees, the temperature at which jet fuel burns, but it does begin to lose a lot of its strength, enough to cause the support beams to fail.

And yet no amount of debunking seems to work. The Internet empowers people with esoteric interests to spend all kinds of time pursuing their hobbies, and if the Truth Movement was the political equivalent of *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction or furries, there wouldn't be much reason to pay attention. But the public opinion trend lines are moving in the truthers' direction, even after the official 9/11 Commission report was supposed to settle the matter once and for all.

Of course, the commission report was something of a whitewash—Bush would only be interviewed in the presence of Dick Cheney, the commission was denied access to other key witnesses and just this year we learned of a meeting convened by George Tenet the summer before the attacks to warn Condoleezza Rice about Al Qaeda's plotting, a meeting that was nowhere mentioned in the report.

Christopher Hayes, a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is a senior editor of In These Times.

So it's hard to blame people for thinking we're not getting the whole story. For six years, the government has prevaricated and the press has largely failed to point out this simple truth. Critics like *The New Yorker*'s Nicholas Lemann might lament the resurgence of the "paranoid style," but the seeds of paranoia have taken root partly because of the complete lack of appropriate skepticism by the establishment press, a complementary impulse to the paranoid style that might be called the credulous style. In the credulous style all political actors are acting with good intentions and in good faith. Mistakes are made, but never because of ulterior motives or undue influence from the various locii of corporate power. When people in power advocate strenuously for a position it is because they believe in it. When their advocacy leads to policies that create misery, it is due not to any evil intentions or greed or corruption, but rather simple human error. Ahmad Chalabi summed up this worldview perfectly. Faced with the utter absence of the WMD he and his cohorts had long touted in Iraq, he replied, "We are heroes in error."

For a long time the credulous style has dominated the establishment, but its hold intensified after 9/11. When the government speaks, particularly about the Enemy, it must be presumed to be telling the truth. From the reporting about Iraq's alleged WMD to the current spate of stories about how "dangerous" Iran is, time and again the press has reacted to official pronouncements about threats with a near total absence of skepticism. Each time the government announces the indictment of domestic terrorists allegedly plotting our demise, the press devotes itself to the story with obsessive relish, only to later note, on page A22 or in a casual aside, that the whole thing was bunk. In August 2003, to cite just one example, the New York dailies breathlessly reported what one US official called an "incredible triumph in the war against terrorism," the arrest of Hemant Lakhani, a supposed terrorist mastermind caught red-handed attempting to acquire a surface-to-air missile. Only later did the government admit that the "plot" consisted of an FBI informant begging Lakhani to find him a missile, while a Russian intelligence officer called up Lakhani and offered to sell him one.

Yet after nearly a dozen such instances, the establishment media continue to earnestly report each new alleged threat or indictment, secure in the belief that their proximity to policymakers gets it closer to the truth. But proximity can obscure more than clarify. It's hard to imagine that the guy sitting next to you at the White House correspondents' dinner is plotting to, say, send the country into a disastrous and illegal war, or is spying on Americans in blatant defiance of federal statutes. Bob Woodward, the journalist with the most access to the Bush Administration, was just about the last one to realize that the White House is disingenuous and cynical, that it has manipulated the machinery of state for its narrow political ends.

Meanwhile, those who realized this was the White House's MO from the beginning have been labeled conspiracy theorists. During the 2004 campaign Howard Dean made the charge that the White House was manipulating the terror threat level and recycling old intelligence. The Bush campaign responded by dismissing Dean as a "bizarre conspiracy theorist." A year later,

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after Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge retired, he admitted that Dean's charge was, indeed, the truth. The same accusation of conspiracy-mongering was routinely leveled at anyone who suggested that the war in Iraq was and is motivated by a desire for the United States to control the world's second-largest oil reserves.

For the Administration, "conspiracy" is a tremendously useful term, and can be applied even in the most seemingly bizarre conditions to declare an inquiry or criticism out of bounds. Responding to a question from NBC's Brian Williams as to whether he ever discusses official business with his father, Bush said such a suggestion was a "kind of conspiracy theory at its most rampant." The credulous style can brook no acknowledgment of unarticulated motives to our political actors, or consultations to which the public is not privy.

The public has been presented with two worldviews, one credulous, one paranoid, and both unsatisfactory. The more the former breaks apart, the greater the appeal of the latter. Conspiracy theories that claim to explain 9/11 are wrongheaded and a terrible waste of time, but the skeptical instinct is, on balance, salutary. It is right to suspect that the operations of government, the power elite and the military-industrial complex are often not what they seem; and proper to raise questions when the answers provided have been unconvincing. Given the untruths to which American citizens have been subjected these past six years, is it any surprise that a majority of them think the government's lying about what happened before and on 9/11?

Still, the persistent appeal of paranoid theories reflects a cynicism that the credulous media have failed to address, because they posit a world of good intentions and face-value pronouncements, one in which the suggestion that a government would mislead or abuse its citizens for its own gains or the gains of its benefactors is on its face absurd. The danger is that the more this government's cynicism and deception are laid bare, the more people—on the left in particular and among the public in general—will be drawn down the rabbit hole of delusion of the 9/11 Truth Movement.

To avoid such a fate, the public must come to trust that the gatekeepers of public discourse share their skepticism about the agenda its government is pursuing. The antidote, ultimately, to the Truth Movement is a press that refuses to allow the government to continue to lie. ■

WHY DID THE SOVIET UNION END? MANY RUSSIANS REGRET ITS DEMISE.

The Soviet Union, R.I.P.?

STEPHEN F. COHEN

The most consequential event of the second half of the twentieth century took place surreptitiously fifteen years ago at a secluded hunting lodge in the Belovezh Forest near Minsk. On December 8, 1991, heads of three of the Soviet Union's fifteen republics, led by Boris Yeltsin of Russia, met there to sign documents abolishing that seventy-four-year-old state.

OMAR RUBIO

Reactions to the end of the Soviet Union were, and remain, profoundly different. For the overwhelming majority of American commentators, it was an unambiguously positive turning point in Russian and world history. As the Soviet breakup quickly became the defining moment in a new American triumphalist narrative, the US government's hope that Mikhail Gorbachev's pro-Soviet democratic and market reforms of 1985–91 would succeed was forgotten. In the media, all the diverse complexity of Soviet history was now presented as "Russia's seven decades as a rigid and ruthless police state," a history "every bit as evil as we had thought—indeed more so." A *New York Times* columnist even suggested that a "fascist Russia" would have been a "much better thing."

American academic specialists reacted similarly, though in their own way. With few exceptions, they reverted, also forgetting what they had only recently written, to pre-Gorbachev Sovietological axioms that the system had always been unreformable and doomed. The opposing scholarly view that there had been other possibilities in Soviet history, "roads not taken," was again dismissed as an "improbable idea" based on "dubious," if not disloyal, notions. Gorbachev's reforms, despite having so remarkably dismantled the Communist Party dictatorship, had been "a chimera," and the Soviet Union therefore died from a "lack of alternatives."

Accordingly, most American specialists no longer asked, even in light of the human tragedies that followed in the 1990s, if a reforming Soviet Union might have been the best hope for the post-Communist future of Russia or any of the other former republics. (Nor have any mainstream commentators asked if its survival would have been better for world affairs.) On the contrary, they concluded, as a leading university authority insisted, that everything Soviet had to be discarded by "the razing of the entire edifice of political and economic relations." Such certitudes are now, of course, the only politically correct ones in US policy, media and academic circles.

A large majority of Russians, on the other hand, as they have regularly made clear in opinion surveys taken during the past fifteen years, regret the end of the Soviet Union, not be-

Stephen F. Cohen is professor of Russian studies and history at New York University. His recent publications include Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia *(Norton) and his July 10* Nation *article, "The New American Cold War."*

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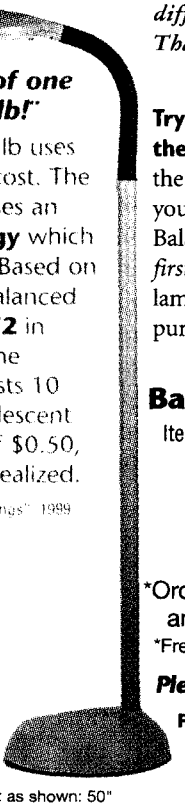

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cause they pine for "Communism" but because they lost a familiar state and secure way of life. No less important, they do not share the nearly unanimous Western view that the Soviet Union's "collapse" was "inevitable" because of inherent fatal defects. They believe instead, and for good reason, that three "subjective" factors broke it up: the way Gorbachev carried out his political and economic reforms; a power struggle in which Yeltsin overthrew the Soviet state in order to get rid of its president, Gorbachev; and property-seizing Soviet bureaucratic elites, the *nomenklatura*, who were more interested in "privatizing" the state's enormous wealth in 1991 than in defending it.

Most Russians, including even the imprisoned post-Soviet oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, therefore still see December 1991 as a "tragedy," a perspective expressed in the adage: "Anyone who does not regret the breakup of the Soviet Union has no heart." (It continues: "And anyone who thinks it can be reconstructed has no head.")

Russian intellectuals believe a historic opportunity was lost to achieve political and economic modernization.

In addition, a growing number of Russian intellectuals have come to believe that something essential was lost—a historic opportunity, thwarted for centuries, to achieve the nation's political and economic modernization by continuing, with or without Gorbachev, his Soviet reformation, or *perestroika*, as he named it. While the Soviet breakup led American specialists back to cold war–era concepts of historical inevitability, it convinced many of their Russian counterparts that "there are always alternatives in history" and that a Soviet reformation had been one of the "lost alternatives"—a chance to democratize and marketize Russia by methods more gradualist, consensual and less traumatic, and thus more fruitful and less costly, than those adopted after 1991.

Whether or not some version of Gorbachev's *perestroika* was a missed opportunity for Russia's "non-catastrophic transformation" instead of its recurring "modernization through catastrophe" may be for historians to decide. But it was already clear at the time, or should have been, that the way the Soviet Union ended—in fateful circumstances about which standard American accounts are largely silent or mythical—boded ill for the future. (One myth, promoted by Yeltsin's supporters to claim he saved the country from Yugoslavia's bloody fate, is that the dissolution was "peaceful." In reality, ethnic civil wars and other strife soon erupted in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, killing hundreds of thousands of former Soviet citizens and brutally displacing even more, a process still under way.)

Most generally, there were ominous parallels between the Soviet breakup and the collapse of Tsarism in 1917. In both cases, the way the old order ended resulted in a near total destruction of Russian statehood that plunged the country into prolonged chaos, conflict and misery. Russians call what ensued *smuta*, a term full of dread derived from previous historical experiences and not expressed in the usual translation, "time of troubles." Indeed, in this respect, the end of the Soviet Union may have had less to do with the specific nature of that system than with recurring breakdowns in Russian history.

The similarities between 1991 and 1917, despite important differences, were significant. Once again, hopes for evolutionary progress toward democracy, prosperity and social justice were crushed; a small group of radicals, this time around Yeltsin, imposed extreme measures on the nation; fierce struggles over property and territory tore apart the foundations of a vast multiethnic state; and the victors destroyed longstanding economic and other essential structures to build entirely anew, "as though we had no past." Once again, elites acted in the name of a better future but left society bitterly divided over yet another of Russia's perennial "accursed questions"—why it had happened. And again the people paid the price.

All of those recapitulations unfolded, amid mutual (and lasting) charges of betrayal, during the three months from August to December 1991, when the piecemeal destruction of the Soviet state occurred. The period began and ended with coups (as in 1917)—the first a failed military putsch against Gorbachev organized by his own ministers in the center of Moscow, the second Yeltsin's liquidation of the state itself in the Belovezh Forest. The period culminated in a revolution from above against the Soviet system of power and property by its own elites. Looking back, Russians of different views have concluded that it was during those months that political extremism and unfettered greed cost them a chance for democratic and economic progress.

Certainly, it is hard to imagine a political act more extreme than abolishing what was still, for all its crises and defections, a nuclear superpower state of 286 million citizens. And yet, Yeltsin did it, as even his sympathizers acknowledged, precipitously and in a way that was "neither legitimate nor democratic." A profound departure from Gorbachev's commitment to social consensus and constitutionalism, it was a return to the country's "neo-Bolshevik" tradition of imposed change, as many Russian, and even a few Western, writers have characterized it. The ramifications were bound to endanger the democratization achieved during the preceding six years of *perestroika*.

Yeltsin and his aides promised, for example, that their extreme measures were "extraordinary" ones, but as had happened before in Russia, most recently during Stalin's forcible collectivization of the peasantry in 1929–33, they grew into a system of rule. (The next such measures, already being planned, were economic "shock therapy.") Those initial steps also had a further political logic. Having ended the Soviet state in a way that lacked legal or popular legitimacy—in a referendum only nine months before, 76 percent of the large turnout had voted to preserve the Union—the Yeltsin ruling group soon became fearful of real democracy. In particular, an independent, freely elected Parliament and the possibility of relinquishing power in any manner raised, we are told by Russians with impeccable democratic credentials, the specter of "going on trial and to prison." And indeed Yeltsin's armed overthrow of the Russian Parliament soon followed.

The economic dimensions of Belovezh were no less portentous. Dissolving the Union without any preparatory stages shat-

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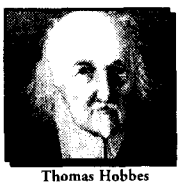
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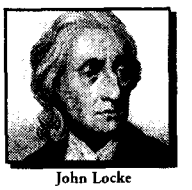
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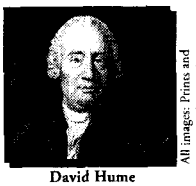
David Hume

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As an educated person, you're aware that many of the basic concepts shaping our world are barely 200 years old. Modern science, technology, democratic government, natural rights, and even a general tendency to be open to innovation are a few examples. Our society and culture take them as givens, even while we continue to debate their meanings and implications.

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tered a highly integrated economy. In addition to abetting the destruction of the state, it was a major cause of the collapse of production across the former Soviet territories, which fell by almost half in the 1990s. That in turn contributed to mass poverty and its attendant social pathologies, which are still, according to a respected Moscow economist, the "main fact" of Russian life today.

The economic motivation behind elite support for Yeltsin in 1991 was even more ramifying. As a onetime Yeltsin supporter wrote thirteen years later, "Almost everything that happened in Russia after 1991 was determined to a significant extent by the divvying-up of the property of the former USSR." Here too there were foreboding historical precedents. Twice before in twentieth-century Russia the nation's fundamental property had been confiscated—the landlords' vast estates and bourgeoisie's industrial and other large assets in the revolution of 1917–18, and then the land of 25 million peasant farmers in Stalin's collectivization drive. The after-effects of both episodes plagued the country for years to come.

Fearful for the loss of their dubiously acquired wealth, the new property holders were threatened by electoral democracy.

Soviet elites took much of the state's enormous wealth, which for decades they had defined in law and ideology as the "property of all the people," with no regard for fair procedures or public opinion. To maintain their dominant position and enrich themselves, they wanted the most valuable state property distributed from above, without the participation of legislatures or any other representatives of society. They achieved that goal first by themselves, through "spontaneous *nomenklatura* privatization," and then, after 1991, through Kremlin decrees issued by Yeltsin, who played, as a former top aide put it, "first fiddle in this historic divvying-up." But as a result, privatization was also haunted from the beginning by, in the words of another Russian scholar, a "'dual illegitimacy'—in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of the population."

The political and economic consequences should have been easy to anticipate. Fearful for their dubiously acquired assets and even for their lives, the new property holders, who formed the post-Soviet elite, were as determined as Yeltsin to limit or reverse the parliamentary electoral democracy initiated by Gorbachev. In its place, they strove to create a kind of praetorian political system devoted to and corrupted by their wealth, at best a "managed" democracy. (Hence their choice of Vladimir Putin, a vigorous man from the security services, to replace the enfeebled President Yeltsin in 1999.) And for much the same reason, uncertain how long they could actually retain their immense property, they were more interested in stripping its assets than investing in it. The result was an 80 percent decline in investment in Russia's economy by the end of the 1990s and the opposite of the nation's modernization, its actual demodernization.

Considering all of these ominous circumstances, why did so many American commentators, from politicians and journalists to scholars, hail the breakup of the Soviet Union as a "breakthrough" to democracy and free-market capitalism? Where Russia was concerned, their reaction was, as usual, based mainly on anti-Communist ideology and hopeful myths, not historical or contemporary realities. Alluding to that myopia on the part of people who had sought the destruction of the Soviet state, a Moscow philosopher later remarked bitterly, "They were aiming at Communism but hitting Russia."

One of the most ideological myths surrounding the end of the Soviet Union was, to quote both another *Times* columnist and a leading American historian, that it "collapsed at the hands of its own people" and brought to power in Russia "Yeltsin and the democrats"—even "moral leaders"—who represented the people. No popular revolution, national election or referendum having mandated or sanctioned the breakup, there was no empirical evidence for this supposition. Indeed, everything strongly suggested very different interpretations, as most Russians have long since concluded.

As for Yeltsin's role, even the most event-making leaders need supporters in order to carry out historic acts. Yeltsin abolished the Soviet Union in December 1991 with the backing of a self-interested alliance. All of its groups called themselves "democrats" and "reformers," but the two most important were unlikely allies: the *nomenklatura* elites that were pursuing the "smell of property like a beast after prey," in the revealing metaphor of Yeltsin's own chief minister, and wanted property much more than any kind of democracy or free-market competition; and an avowedly prodemocracy wing of the intelligentsia. Traditional enemies in the pre-Gorbachev Soviet system, they colluded in 1991 largely because the intelligentsia's radical market ideas seemed to justify *nomenklatura* privatization.

But the most influential pro-Yeltsin intellectuals, who played leading roles in his post-Soviet government, were neither coincidental fellow travelers nor real democrats. Since the late 1980s, they had insisted that free-market economics and large-scale private property would have to be imposed on a recalcitrant Russian society by an "iron hand" regime. This "great leap," as they extolled it, would entail "tough and unpopular" policies resulting in "mass dissatisfaction" and thus would necessitate "anti-democratic measures." Like the property-seeking elites, they saw Russia's newly elected legislatures as an obstacle. Admirers of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, who had brutally imposed economic change on Chile, they said of Yeltsin, now their leader, "Let him be a dictator!" Not surprisingly, they cheered (along with the US government and mainstream media) when he used tanks to destroy Russia's popularly elected Parliament in 1993.

Political and economic alternatives still existed in Russia after 1991. Other fateful struggles and decisions lay ahead. And none of the factors contributing to the end of the Soviet Union were inexorable or deterministic. But even if authentic democratic and market aspirations were among them, so were cravings for power, political coups, elite avarice, extremist ideas and widespread perceptions of illegitimacy and betrayal. All of these factors continued to play a role after 1991, but it should already have been clear which would prevail. ■

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THE JORDAN-U.S. FTA WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A LABOR-RIGHTS MODEL. IT'S BEEN A DISASTER.

Free-Trade Bondage in Jordan

KRISTEN GILLESPIE

Amman

In the most remote desert areas of the Kingdom of Jordan, a hidden army of tens of thousands of imported workers toils night and day in more than 100 factories in a recently established free-trade zone, putting together T-shirts, fleeces and pants destined for Wal-Mart, Target and L.L. Bean, among other stores. The factory conditions are reminiscent of the nineteenth century's early industrial age: The hangarlike buildings have poor ventilation, and the workers sit on backless benches in long rows, performing the same tasks over and over, thousands of times a day.

The workers, mostly from Bangladesh, China, India and Sri Lanka, are barred by Jordanian law from joining unions. In most cases, their passports are confiscated at the airport when they arrive. Only a handful are given valid work permits, but without one they can be arrested and jailed. That's why employees rarely leave the guarded compounds where they live and work. Bangladeshi employees I interviewed secretly at night outside their compound spoke of unpaid overtime, wages withheld for months, filthy living conditions, inadequate food and mental and physical exhaustion from the long hours.

Yet none of the nearly seventy workers interviewed wanted to leave Jordan, because they are in debt. A worker in Bangladesh often borrows up to $3,000 from family, home village or bank to buy a work contract. The recruitment agency takes a cut and the banks charge around 5 percent interest a month, so the worker becomes an indentured servant. Overwhelming debt, a language barrier, almost no legal oversight in Jordan, and fear of leaving the compound and being arrested are among the factors preventing workers from protesting conditions. Plus, they're busy: They are required to make a certain number of garments every day, and the piece rate is set so high that they work late into the night. These faceless migrants represent "the garbage of the global economy" to multinational corporations, said Charles Kernaghan, head of the New York City–based National Labor Committee, whose devastating May report exposed the slavelike conditions in Jordan.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The Jordan-US free-trade agreement (FTA) entered into force in 2001 to stimulate business in a country where the annual per capita income hovers at around $2,400. Unemployment is officially estimated at 14 percent, and unofficially at 30 percent. Jordan was the fourth country—and the first Arab country—to gain duty-free access to the US market, one of the rewards for signing a peace treaty with Israel. The Clinton Administration negotiated the terms of the agreement, and according to Thea Lee, policy director at the AFL-CIO, the Administration approached the US labor movement to incorporate workers' rights language into the text. For the first time, Lee said, "we were offered a seat at the table."

The terms weren't ideal, but Jordan did commit to respecting International Labor Organization standards, which allow for

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collective bargaining and the right to strike, with the possibility of trade sanctions in the event of gross violations. The US labor movement believed these legal protections would serve as a model for future agreements. "We finally had a trade agreement that we could hold up and say, 'We can protect workers, and economies aren't collapsing,'" said Tim Waters, rapid response director of the United Steelworkers.

But the FTA wasn't implemented as intended. The text of the agreement refers to "raising living standards," but the Jordanian workforce spurned the new industry, partly because of cultural taboos regarding the shame of menial labor and women working outside the home, and partly because the minimum wage is unacceptably low. As many as 60 percent of the workers are non-Jordanian. And some 90 percent of the apparel factories are non-Jordanian-owned, with the profits going straight out of the country. Fewer Jordanian employees means a more docile workforce for the multinational apparel companies, which, under the terms of the FTA, are already exempt from tariffs and quotas, saving them 15 percent up front. Garment exports from Jordan to the United States totaled $1.1 billion last year.

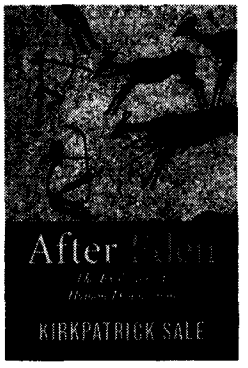
Five years after lobbying for the Jordan FTA, the labor movement is retrenching. In September the AFL-CIO filed a complaint under the labor chapter of the agreement to pressure Jordan to reform its laws and comply with ILO obligations. The Jordanian government has made some cosmetic improvements, but it still hasn't amended its labor law and granted foreign workers the right to organize and be paid the promised wages. The harsh reality is that many are still trapped in factories and are beaten, threatened and worked past the point of exhaustion.

Meanwhile, the Jordan FTA has been shunted aside as a regional model in favor of the Oman FTA, which Congress passed in July. The Oman agreement has a workers' rights component, but it's far weaker than Jordan's. In the event of labor infractions, the Omani government is required to pay a fine of up to $15 million, using the money to improve working conditions. But there's no enforcement mechanism, just a promise on paper. In a country of 3 million, 80 percent of Oman's private-sector workforce is already imported. These migrants are not permitted to join unions, and they have scant legal recourse in the event of abuses.

Waters thinks that with the new Democratic Congress, countries like Jordan will no longer be able to get away with minimal oversight of their factories. "The government of Jordan shouldn't think we've forgotten about this issue, because we haven't," he said. "Nothing short of amending the labor law to allow workers to organize and bargain collectively will fix this situation. There ought to be a lot of nervous people in Amman right about now." American labor advocates point to the November election, in which twenty-nine House and seven Senate seats switched from an unchecked free-trade agenda to a fair-trade one, as a sign that they'll soon get their seat back at the negotiating table. And with that, said Lori Wallach of Public Citizen, expect to see new Democratic proposals "on how to do free trade right." Until the laws are reformed, we will, as Kernaghan said, "live in a society where the label is protected, the logo is protected and the corporate product is protected, but not the human being who made it." ■

Kristen Gillespie is a reporter based in Amman, Jordan.

OUR OWN WORST ENEMY?



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EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

Sydney, Australia

■ Two things could be added to Katrina vanden Heuvel's list of ten: (1) preferential voting (like in Australia) would help break the dominance of the GOP and the Democrats; (2) compulsory voting for all citizens. This would mean that elections no longer come down to who can energize the most voters. Yes, it would be expensive, but for the most powerful and wealthiest democracy in the world, surely it would be worth it. GARETH DAVIDSON

Bellevue, Ky.

■ Your list of steps for voting reform misses the most important step, without which the disease of moneyed interests cannot be excised from the body politic—namely, to limit the length of election campaigns (as is done in other industrial democracies) to something on the order of six to eight weeks. It is the eighteen-month campaign cycle that requires small and large fortunes to be spent on advertising, enriching the media and empowering the claque of "professionals" while bringing the business of governing to a standstill as incumbents trawl for dollars. There is nothing candidates have to say or voters to learn that cannot be done in two months. A related step would be to ban television advertising in the two weeks before the vote and devote that time to televised debates. FRED WARREN

Ardmore, Pa.

■ How about going back to the days when the television channels were required to give free and equal time to candidates? The airwaves belong to the public, but the broadcast media have been bought and sold by the huge money they make in campaigns. I would rather have that money go to disaster victims, or wounded veterans, or poor or sick people. Or maybe we could pay each person $10 to vote to get everyone voting. Wouldn't it be grand if elected officials did not have to start running for office and begging for campaign money the week after they are elected? And would it be possible to limit the duration of campaigns? I get so sick of months of the same baloney over and over. Our legislators would have more time to read the bills they pass if they were not campaigning throughout their entire term. Money is fatally corrupting our democracy. ANNA DURBIN

Folsom, Calif.

■ To extend your example of a voting machine with a paper trail like any ATM: ATMs are owned and programmed by the banks, not the ATM manufacturer. The voting machines and their programming need to be owned by the Election Commission of each state. The voting machine manufacturers would be responsible only for the maintenance and functioning of the machines in contract with the state, as would any company selling its product under warranty. Further, the voting machine manufacturers would be responsible for supplying a bug-free programming language under a normal contract for software. All the programming would be done by the Election Commissions with an independent body testing and certifying the voting programs. M.L. THRON

Downey, Calif.

■ There are two additional areas where our voting rights are vulnerable. A paper trail does no one any good unless someone looks at the paper once in a while!

1. Federal standards for audit and recounts of election results are essential to guaranteeing the integrity of elections. These standards should specify both random and trigger threshold criteria for recounts and audits and set reasonable limits on cost.

2. Independent exit polling, with raw data available to researchers and election observers, should be mandatory state by state and in federal elections. One of the standards for triggering a recount or audit should be discrepancies with independent exit polling. Rules that hinder exit polling should be prohibited.

MATTHEW FILLER

Vallejo, Calif.

■ The concept of winning with a simple majority (50 percent +1) should be discarded. By requiring 55 percent of the vote to win, we insure at least a ten-point margin. If no candidate garners a winning percentage, there's a runoff. This would force aspiring candidates to run (and act in office) in a less extremist manner than what we are currently seeing.

Next, I have always abhorred the idea that if the election has a very low turnout a relatively small percentage of the population can elect a President. I suggest that a minimum percentage of eligible voters be required to participate in an election before it can be considered legitimate. Consider it a quorum. I'm in favor of setting the bar fairly high—even 75 or 80 percent. Provide every voter with a set of receipts, and require that every state and federal tax return include verification that the voter participated in the most recent election (possibly even down to the municipal level) before a return is considered complete. PAT HEALY

Pleasant Grove, Calif.

■ I couldn't agree more with the idea that no voter should be disenfranchised without being notified and allowed to contest it! This recently happened to me, and had I not gone to the elections office to inquire about my missing absentee ballot, I would never have known that my registration was canceled. They claimed I had moved out of the county (I haven't moved in more than five years and I have *never* lived in the county they claimed I'd moved to). I did get to cast a provisional ballot, but I wonder if it was counted. ALAN DEALA

Lubbock, Texas

■ While I wholeheartedly agree with Katrina vanden Heuvel's ten points for repairing and strengthening our broken voting system, I must point out that her assertion that the right to vote is not in our Constitution is wrong. The right to vote is articulated and affirmed in the Fifteenth Amendment (right to vote may not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude), the Nineteenth Amendment (right to vote may not be denied or abridged on account of sex), the Twenty-fourth Amendment (right to vote may not be denied or abridged for failure to pay poll tax) and the 26th Amendment (right to vote of citizens age 18 or older may not be denied or abridged on account of age). RALPH H. BROCK

VANDEN HEUVEL REPLIES

New York City

■ The spirited response to my modest editorial—these letters are just a sampling of the scores we received—tells me people are hungry to fulfill the promise of our democracy. Sure, there are disagreements about how to fix our flawed electoral system; but what's heartening is that as small "d" democrats, we're all working for reform and renewal.

A few specific points:

Warren D. Smith is wrong to argue that instant-runoff voting will not end the duopoly. IRV gives third parties political space to breathe and build support and, yes, if major parties run flawed candidates or become unrepresentative, win. (Witness Mary Robinson's victory in the Irish presidential race in 1990 or Ken Livingstone's win in the first London mayoral race.) Smith is inaccurate in arguing that proportional representation is constitutionally questionable. Many experts believe that range voting would create a strategic mess; there are good reasons it hasn't been adopted for any election of any kind.

Jim Verdieck extols voting by mail. But I worry that eliminating polling places causes a loss of the community feeling that comes from gathering with your neighbors to cast your vote. I'd prefer to help get the aged and infirm to the polls and use the mail only if you cannot physically get there. Also, Vote by Mail can increase campaign costs.

I second Peter Franck's call for full voting rights for Washington, DC, residents, who have been denied participation in our democracy for far too long. (Support HR 5388, the DC Voting Rights Act, which would give Washingtonians representation in the House for the first time.)

Ed Powick is right on. Candidates with the majority of the popular vote should win elections. The bill he mentions is better known as the National Popular Vote bill. Go to the invaluable Center for Voting and Democracy's website (www.fairvote.org) to learn more.

(Continued on Page 36)

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Plot Against Equality

ROBERT S. BOYNTON

THE TROUBLE WITH DIVERSITY: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality.
By Walter Benn Michaels.
Metropolitan. 243 pp. $23.

Anyone who still believes in the reality of race ought to spend some time reading graduate school applications. Every year my department receives a few hundred, a growing portion from students who identify themselves as of "mixed race" or fail to check anything at all, leaving me to use my sleuthing skills for clues about their ethnic heritage.

I'm not alone. In the 2000 US Census, 7 million people, 40 percent of whom were under age 18, picked more than one racial or ethnic category for themselves. Between 1991 and 2001 the number of students in higher education whose race is officially "unknown" increased 100 percent. Americans still use the language of race to identify themselves—they just don't agree about what "race" is.

Why do I spend so much effort trying to fit students into racial categories whose biological basis has been thoroughly discredited? According to literary critic Walter Benn Michaels, author of *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, I'm engaging in a fruitless, even sinister, reactionary enterprise, one that distracts vital attention from the only social division that ultimately matters: class. How can I be certain that the "minorities" I'm admitting are truly disadvantaged, Michaels would ask, and not the children of the growing black middle class? And even if these minority candidates are economically disadvantaged, he'd continue, why do I assume that they, by virtue of their ethnicity, will bring more (or different) insights than other students?

Robert S. Boynton, head of the Magazine Writing Program at New York University, is the author of The New New Journalism *(2005).*

Would that I could respond with the theoretical sophistication (though not the repetitiveness) of Michaels's book. Alas, my answer is quite ad hoc and mundane. Given the pool applying to my expensive private university, I've found that race is a fairly reliable proxy for disadvantage (at least relative to the other applicants). While I'm always on the lookout for telltale phrases like "first in my family to attend college," our application has no "poor" box to check, and virtually everyone requests financial aid.

Michaels is certainly correct that while in theory diversity includes such nonracial characteristics as geographic origin and economic status, they play a minor role in most calculations. In America, diversity is synonymous with race. In both the corporate and educational realms, the

[illegible]

jargon of diversity has acquired a holy air. "Diversity has become a word that must be spoken," Alan Contreras, the administrator of the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization, writes on the website Inside Higher Ed. "Those who don't speak it in the right slightly breathless tone while looking both sorrowful and committed are unemployable."

Diversity acquired its current meaning in 1978, when the Supreme Court (in *University of California Regents v. Bakke*) ruled that taking the race of an applicant into consideration was acceptable if it served "the interest of diversity." Never simple to begin with, the civil rights–era methods of race-based affirmative action were translated into the amorphous language of multiculturalism.

The Trouble With Diversity is a bracing jeremiad, an all-out assault on the way identity in general, and race in particular,

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is used to organize society. It is also a thought experiment in which Michaels invites us to remove our race-tinted glasses and view the world in the class-based terms that, he argues, actually define it. For Michaels, there is no middle ground, no room for compromise: Race shoved class out of American consciousness, and he wants to reverse the situation. "We love race—we love identity—because we don't love class," he writes. The alternative is not to "love" class, since Michaels knows that class, unlike race, is distinctly unlovable. Class inspires no "National Museum of Lower-Income Americans on the Mall" in Washington, and no special holidays celebrating the culture of the poor (indeed, the "culture of poverty" is a sociological epithet); while some poor people inherit their poverty, we would all agree with Michaels that it would be perverse to think of it as their "heritage." The only area in which we are sentimental about poverty is in studies of working-class culture and literature, in which class is considered a form of identity.

By lumping together the categories of race, class and gender—the holy trinity of academic cultural studies—and treating them as different but equal identities, we have decided to manage inequality rather than reduce, much less eradicate, it. For Michaels, this conceptual sleight of hand is nothing less than a crime.

The Trouble With Diversity is the most recent product of the movement the late cultural critic Ellen Willis dubbed "economic majoritarianism." Readers of Thomas Frank, Todd Gitlin, Richard Rorty and others will be familiar with the thesis, according to which identity politics has led the left astray, miring it in endless cultural debates that sap the will and sacrifice elections. Only a renewed commitment to economic justice, the majoritarians argue, can revive it (a strategy vindicated, some argue, by the results of the midterm elections). Even literary critic Terry Eagleton has joined the anti-identity crowd, concluding his book *After Theory* (2003) with the charge that "cultural theory...cannot afford simply to keep recounting the same narratives of class, race and gender."

Michaels's approach is more philosophical than that of these politically minded critics. Where they cautiously distance themselves from divisive ideological positions, he embraces them: He calls for redistributing wealth, abolishing inheritance and doing away with race-based affirmative action. He doesn't care about rallying a particular party or crusading for the underclass ("I'm not writing this book out of a passionate sense of identification with the poor," he told *The Chronicle of Higher Education*), and he confesses that even his $175,000 salary isn't enough to stifle his envy of the truly rich. His strategy is to reveal the flawed foundation on which the concepts of race and identity rest, in the hope that we therefore stop caring about them. "Treating race as a social fact amounts to nothing more than acknowledging that we were mistaken to think of it as a biological fact and then insisting that we ought to keep making the mistake," he writes. "Maybe instead we ought to stop making the mistake."

You don't have to be a black person from the slums or a Native American raised on a reservation to recognize the naïveté of this "sophisticated" analysis—resting, as it does, on the premise that a logical deconstruction of a concept can neutralize the power with which history has invested it. Michaels isn't a reactionary, but his quixotic faith in abstract reason is, as Orwell once wrote, "the sort of nonsense only an intellectual could believe." In a sense, *The Trouble With Diversity* is really two books in one. The first is a smart, unsentimental polemic that thinks nothing of declaring the death of a language (like American Sign Language) or a culture (like Bolivia's Aymara Indians) a "victimless crime." Coupled with that is a second book that resembles one of those yearly late-night conversations in which freshman philosophy majors scrutinize, and swiftly "solve," the problems of the world. Michaels is as right about the conceptual incoherence of racial/identity politics as he is wrong and facile about how one might go about alleviating them.

Michaels's fondness for all-or-nothing reasoning first appeared in "Against Theory," the 1982 essay he wrote with Steven Knapp. Theory had come to dominate literary studies, they complained, leading critics to view themselves as working with the kind of foundational, transcendental principles commonly associated with science or certain branches of philosophy. As an alternative, they advocated more practical, if less precise, approaches, such as New Historicism. No school of thought was exempt from their wrath. "If we are right," they wrote, "then the whole enterprise of critical theory is misguided and should be abandoned."

In *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987), Michaels solidified his reputation as one of the leading scholars of American culture with innova-

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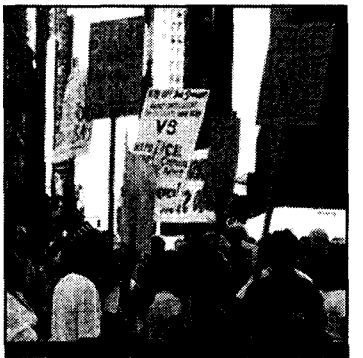
tive readings of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novelists like Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris and Nathaniel Hawthorne. With *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (1995), he rehearsed the ideas that come to fruition in *The Trouble With Diversity*. *Our America* is essentially a genealogy of American multiculturalism, beginning with the story of how authors of the 1920s—William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather—contributed to a racial (and racist) basis for American identity. Whereas these authors conceived of their work as shifting from a racial to a cultural conception of identity—from stultifying superiority to a liberating diversity, in which all identities are equal—Michaels showed how their project was not as progressive as it seemed, and in fact lent itself to racial thinking of a kind they would have abhorred. At one point, even the Ku Klux Klan adopted the phrase "Difference Not Inferiority" as a slogan.

Furthermore, Michaels accused contemporary champions of postidentity theory—those who envisage identity as contingent, performative and fluid—of employing the very racial essentialism they oppose. The more we emphasize culture and diversity, he scolded, the more we become mired in race. We inevitably answer the question "What should we do?" in terms of "who we are"—an appeal to racial/ethnic identity. The quest for identity is a vicious circle in which one can never escape the nineteenth-century notion of race. "For racial identity to become a project, it must turn to culture; for cultural identity to become a project, it must turn to race," he wrote.

In *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (2004), Michaels attacked the identity politics of those who believe they are ineluctably connected to events—slavery, the Holocaust—they never experienced. The notion that the past "belongs" to anyone is absurd, he argued. "Why should slavery and apartheid be compensable," he asked in a discussion of the reparations movement, while "free but poorly paid labor is not?" His claim wasn't only that all affirmations of connection to the past are futile but that anyone who makes them is a foe of economic justice. "It's one thing to celebrate Black History Month; it's another thing to redistribute wealth. And, in fact, the two things are not only different, they are, in crucial ways, opposed," he wrote. Race isn't merely trumped by class in the world according to Walter Benn Michaels, it is, bizarrely enough, obliterated by it.

— The Futility of War —

When men* engage in war, they endanger not only their own and others' lives, but also the well-being of the planet on which they depend for life itself. The Earth is plundered recklessly for the metals of all kinds used in the ordnance of death. No thought is given to the needs of future generations who also have the right to the planet's bounty. Countless millions of tons of twisted, rusting iron adorn the 'theatres of war' where men enact their deadly pageantry. Men cannot see, or even imagine, the devastation caused to their subtle bodies by endless hours of bombardment. The unprecedented levels of noise tear and shred these sensitive veils. The human frame is not constructed for such abuse. Thus do they do themselves irreparable harm. How long, therefore, will it take men to realize the futility of war? War solves no problem; it creates only chaos, and halts the progress of man.



"The people are sensing their power and are coming to understand that they must make the peace they all desire."

Relish

Some, few, men, it must be said, relish the act of war. It is, for them, an act of valour, a test of their will and skill, but mainly, today, men are drawn into war for ideological reasons, for the cause. Hence it is the leaders of the nations who hold the reins of power, who legislate for war or peace. They must be carefully chosen to ensure a peaceful world.

Much thought must now be given to this problem. Recent events in the Middle East have shown how simple it is to transgress the rule of Law and let loose chaos; to rectify the transgression and bring resolution is quite another matter.

Equilibrium

Maitreya watches these events with care. He calculates precisely the tensions and their relaxation as they occur and seeks always to establish equilibrium. In this respect, the energies of the Spirit of Peace or Equilibrium, focused through Maitreya, play a vital part. Potent and precise, they are turning the tide of hatred and warring instincts which so trouble the peoples of the nations.

The people themselves are beginning to play their part. Through ballot-box and demonstration they are making their voices heard, their demands for peace known. From this point there is no turning back. The people are sensing their power and are coming to understand that they must make the peace they all desire, and that only when justice reigns with freedom will blessed peace be assured.

This growing understanding will set the scene for Maitreya's early emergence.

This article, published in *Share International* magazine, was written by a Master of Wisdom. The Masters, headed by Maitreya, the World Teacher, are highly advanced teachers and advisors of humanity who are planning to work openly in the world very soon.

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That we must choose between a society concerned with race and one concerned with economic inequality is the cornerstone of Michaels's project. But must we? And even if we must, is it really so obvious that the evils of economic inequality always trump those of racism (or that the two can be so neatly disentangled)? It is telling that Michaels never feels the need to formulate an argument for the superiority of a class-oriented society. It is just assumed; all of his energy goes into debunking race. As a result, *The Trouble With Diversity* has a relentless, monomaniacal tone, its author marshaling more and more evidence to prove that considerations of race are never more than a ploy to avoid confronting poverty.

But there is something perverse about the way Michaels looks at America, as if it were little more than a university writ large. In fact, most cases in which race-based affirmative action comes into play do so in a fashion that has little to do with the way it influences higher education. There are plenty of spheres (civil service, the military) in which affirmative action has reduced economic inequality—evidence that there are occasions when society can simultaneously tackle racial injustice and look out for its less fortunate members. According to the 2005 *Annual Review of Sociology*, the wages of both black men and women rose during periods when affirmative action laws were vigorously enforced. Outside the university, Michaels's either/or choice isn't always so stark.

At a time when public school segregation is returning to *Brown v. Board of Education*–era levels, particularly in urban areas, I find it hard to believe that race is as unimportant as Michaels believes it is. Studies that take their inspiration from the racial and class composition of Harvard's freshman class are bound to end up prisoners of their own (class?) assumptions. Had Michaels spent more time pondering the world beyond the campus walls, he might have reconsidered his assumption that class-conscious, rather than race-conscious, societies are more likely to prize economic equality. What to make of countries like India, Indonesia and France, to mention only a few? Have their attempts to diminish consciousness about identity among their citizens unleashed a surge of concern for economic equality?

The greatest virtue of *The Trouble With Diversity* is the tenacity and precision with which Michaels dissects our muddled ideas about race and identity. Our obsession with identity has stifled not only the discussion of economic inequality but of politics itself. When "the debate we might have about inequality... becomes a debate instead about prejudice and respect," he writes, "we end up having no debate at all." ■

Uncle Tom's Shadow

DARRYL LORENZO WELLINGTON

THE ANNOTATED UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.
By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Edited with an introduction and notes by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Hollis Robbins. Norton. 480 pp. $39.95.

As Borges observed, it is not the order in which books are written that most influences us; it is the order in which we read them. Case in point: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Today, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel is read—when it is read at all—as an assignment in middle or high school. We are introduced to it as part of an elementary-level education. What is more, many people who have never read the book believe they have a fair idea of its contents. They know it is a tract attacking the great American injustice: slavery. The book they imagine is polemical, high-toned, shrill and simplistic. (For many potential readers the very title is off-putting; Uncle Tom's own name has become a slur.) If we're willing to grant the book any virtues, they're the kind we believe—or used to believe—instill moral rectitude in the young and naïve.

Much more than Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Poe's fiction and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remains frozen in the past, a blurry childhood memory. Many adults will have the experience of weighing their youthful impressions of Twain, Poe and Conan Doyle against their mature understanding. Not so with the tale of Uncle Tom, Eliza, Little Eva, Topsy and Simon Legree. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a moralizing tale, the kind of material adults blithely leave behind and rarely revisit.

Yet before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was dispensed with as a children's tale, it was a social phenomenon and, arguably, the most influential novel in American history. Published in 1852, Stowe's antislavery novel galvanized public opinion on a question that would become the major irritant behind the Civil War, which erupted less than a decade later. It sold more copies than any other book in American history (except, of course, the Bible). It was acclaimed by Northern abolitionists; it inspired denunciatory Southern anti–*Uncle Tom's Cabin* novels that, preposterously, presented slavery as a benign institution. Almost like a religious text, the novel has proved peculiarly susceptible to distortion and misappropriation. For generations after the Civil War, the story's success as a novel was outstripped by the popularity of theatrical adaptations, musicals and, at worst, minstrel shows, which departed drastically from Stowe's intentions. In fact, there were "Tom shows" in the late 1800s and early 1900s that completely excised the story's antislavery message. Throughout the early 1900s, the familiar characters were cheapened by overuse in product advertisements.

By the 1940s, when the book's popularity waned, its time had come to die of overexposure. Yet *Uncle Tom's Cabin* still casts a shadow. It is a piece of Americana; it is inseparable from the legacy of slavery and racism. To an extent, we are embarrassed by the novel, its subject matter (slavery, which our sophisticated minds are embarrassed to be reminded of) and its obvious artistic flaws—melodrama and sentimentality. The book's reputation has also been undermined by a widespread confusion with some of the offensive theatrical adaptations. The perception lingers that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a blend of children's fable and propaganda; it cannot be more. This is roughly the argument that James Baldwin makes in his famous 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel." For Baldwin, then a young, ambitious writer who was himself no stranger to polemic, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the worst kind of exhortatory narrative. Looking at history backward, Baldwin was less impressed by the power with which Stowe decried slavery

Darryl Lorenzo Wellington is a poet and social critic who lives in Charleston, South Carolina. His work has appeared in the Christian Science Monitor, Dissent *and other publications.*

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Relaxation therapy for your feet

Visco-elastic foam has changed the way people sleep, now it helps the way you walk.

by Leigh Ligon

My feet hurt! How many times have you heard *or* said that...standing in line at the grocery store or simply while doing daily routine tasks? I feel like the older I get the more my feet ache. I've tried elevating my feet, soaking them in a hot water and expensive massage therapy—but to no avail. That's why I'm so excited to tell you about my recent discovery—CLOUD 10 Slippers!

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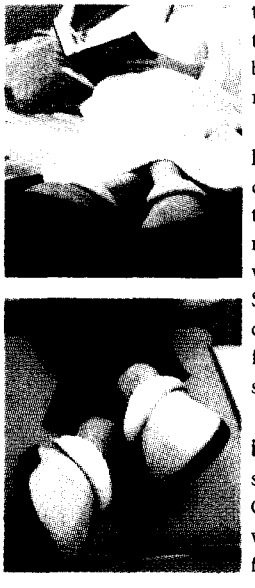

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than he was dismayed by the limitations of her views on race, the human condition and the meaning of freedom.

Yet there is also Edmund Wilson's opinion. It may surprise readers to learn that little more than a decade after Baldwin delivered his scathing indictment, the renowned literary critic insisted that, at its core, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* possessed real literary value, even if the nature of its literary accomplishment was difficult to put a finger on. "To expose oneself in maturity to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may... prove a startling experience," Wilson wrote in 1962. "It is a much more impressive work than one has ever been allowed to suspect." Note the wording: *a much more impressive work than one has ever been allowed to suspect*. The phrasing hints at the motives behind the urge to parody, trivialize and distort *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as Baldwin wrote, just "a very bad novel," a repository of stereotypes that have stayed with us ever since? Or is the majority opinion correct that the novel is a light read that deserves respect for its abolitionist message but little else? Or could it be, as Wilson believed, that history has stunted our ability to read this novel without blinders and reinforced resistance to its flashes of brilliance, its power and its relevance? And given the wide disparity of opinions that have gathered around it, how can we hope to appreciate the real *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

Is Uncle Tom's Cabin *a 'very bad novel,' as James Baldwin wrote, or has the book's strange career blinded us to its power?*

Let me offer, first, a refresher course for my readers' blurred childhood memories. Harriet Beecher Stowe—a very religious woman living in a very religious age—wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in an eruption of indignation over the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which legally mandated the return of escaped slaves to their Southern owners. Stowe was at the time living with her husband and children in Maine. Her novel tells two stories. Its contrapuntal narrative goes as follows: Arthur and Emily Shelby are forced by financial considerations to sell two of their slaves. Emily's light-skinned house slave, Eliza, overhears the plan and flees with her young son and her husband, George. They survive various, often violent travails and escape to freedom in Canada. Meanwhile, the faithful and pious field slave Uncle Tom accepts his fate and is sold by the Shelbys to the St. Clares of New Orleans: Augustine St. Clare; his wife, Marie; and their small daughter, the angelic Little Eva. Augustine also purchases a strange, mischievous slave child, Topsy. Uncle Tom becomes an integral part of the St. Clare family; his unassuming piety converts both Eva and Augustine (but not the coldhearted Marie) to abolitionism, but his two new allies die tragically. The widowed Marie St. Clare sells Tom to the ruthless Simon Legree. Uncle Tom's fate is pretty much sealed.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Hollis Robbins's newly annotated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will provide readers—mature, adult readers—with an opportunity to put aside their prejudices about the book. If the plot as summarized above reads like a soap opera, consider, too, that today "To be or not to be" reads like cliché. How will *Uncle Tom's Cabin* impress twenty-first-century, post-civil-rights-era audiences, if we are finally ready to give the novel a fair hearing?

Gates and Robbins's new edition is handsomely illustrated with book cover and poster representations—both refined and stereotypical—of Little Eva, Topsy, Augustine's spinsterish cousin Miss Ophelia and the pious Uncle Tom. For all that, however, *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* is somewhat less authoritative than it purports to be.

Robbins provides an adequate history of the composition of the novel. Neither she nor Gates, however, provides extensive commentary on the stage play adaptations, a fascinating history explored in depth by Thomas Gossett in *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. It is astonishing and disturbing to consider how this text, while admittedly melodramatic, was tweaked to play as a stock comedy. Reconstruction-era audiences took their revenge on Stowe's novel while the country reneged on potential civil rights gains for the freed slaves. Instead of an opportunity to reflect on the rights of men, and on the abuse of those rights, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a campy exercise in the exorcism and cleansing of white guilt. By reproducing dozens of period posters and illustrations, *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* hints at this history. But it fails to provide a more in-depth analysis of the curious relationship between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Reconstruction, potentially depriving readers of an adequate historical context—the very tools they will need to disentangle the book they've heard about from the book itself.

If Robbins's historical commentary is too cursory, Gates's analysis of the book is blithe—and difficult to pin down. He often seems less admiring than amused. His introduction and annotations are peppered with witticisms, particularly at the expense of Uncle Tom's friendship with Little Eva. "Tom and Little Eva 'meet cute,' as they say in Hollywood." Or: "Tom leaves his home and almost immediately becomes involved with a young blonde."

This flippancy undermines his introduction. Throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe contrasts images of happy domesticity and images of broken slave families. In the sentimentalized portraits of the Victorian era, supreme happiness was embodied by the unity of father, mother and children. Slavery constantly threatened and too often severed this unity when slave wives, husbands and children were sold away and forcibly separated from one another. This strikes me as an accurate analysis. Gates wanders far afield by claiming that "the most important room in the novel is not the kitchen but the bedroom." Rereading the novel as an adult, he is surprised by its "polymorphous sexual energy."

Gates tries to interpret the novel on the basis of its sexual symbolism, but, frankly, I don't think he has discovered anything so impressive or surprising—certainly nothing that will not already seem evident to the average adult reader. "Slavery," he notes, "in part, was about unbridled, unregulated sex, always potentially available in the relation between master and slave." Stowe intuited this, and so did her audience. Gates's emphasis on sexual symbols seems like the amusement of a child who has been assigned *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and, between the lines, discovered Mandingo.

Gates, in fact, seems less interested in Stowe's literary accomplishment—or lack thereof—than in James Baldwin's 1949 essay. "Everybody's Protest Novel" remains an important piece of cultural analysis, although it perfunctorily dismisses *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Baldwin's hostility to the novel has been shared by many twentieth-century black writers whose works make us appreciate the depth of the psychological scars of racial prejudice. Baldwin was unable to stomach the matriarchal zeal and (by today's standards) condescending tone of Stowe's case for black emancipation—really, her case for black humanity. Gates succinct-

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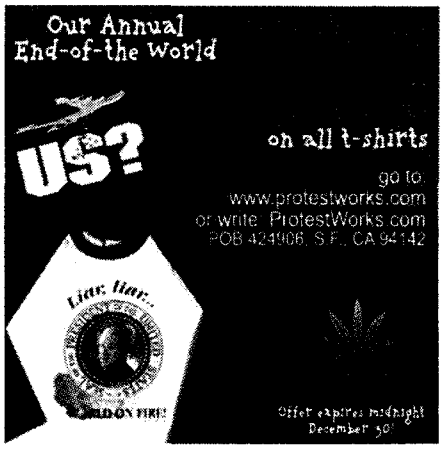

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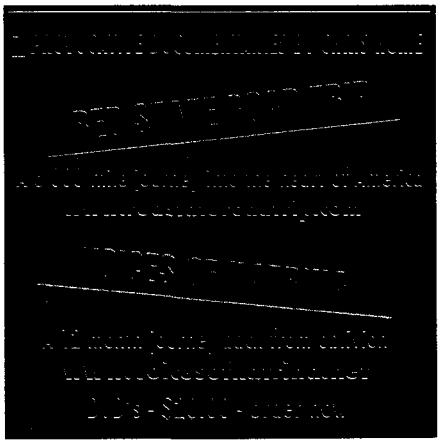

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ly explains the reasoning by which Baldwin accuses Stowe, the ostensible abolitionist, of backhandedly rejecting the essence of freedom: "Tom, as a character, *forebears* impressively, but he does not create.... Forbearance, at least Tom's sort...precludes selfhood, just as slavery sought to do. For Baldwin, this is Uncle Tom's greatest crime."

Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel" is less a careful reading of Stowe's work than a personal manifesto, a gesture toward self-liberation. Baldwin refuses to see a hint of irony in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He begins his essay by scoffing at the pomposity of a statement Augustine St. Clare utters midway through: "The whole [black] race are pretty generally understood to be turned over to the devil, for our benefit, in this world, however it may turn out in another!" Yet it's clear that Stowe wants readers to view this statement critically; it has a dual significance—both as a cryptic warning and as a trope that exposes Augustine's hypocrisy as a slave owner. In a later essay Baldwin would reminisce that as a child he "read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* compulsively.... I was trying to find out something, sensing something in the book of some immense import for me: which, however I knew I did not really understand." This is revealing. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a novel that scarred Baldwin personally; it also fascinated him deeply. One wonders, moreover, if before writing "Everybody's Protest Novel," he had reread *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an adult.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is definitely not a children's book. Rather, it is a novel that's too often read too early, whether by critics like Gates who may later be too impressed by the novel's transparent sexual content or by those who may, like Baldwin, be less than reliable in their historical and literary assessment of the novel because they cannot distance themselves from their own issues with race and identity.

Uncle Tom's Cabin would not be memorable if it were the dainty book described in "Everybody's Protest Novel," so precious and shallow in its insistence that slavery is "perfectly horrible." Forget the buffoonish stage adaptations. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is as violent as a Quentin Tarantino movie. A depressed slave mother jumps with her child into a river rather than return to bondage. George Shelby, the escaped slave, picks up a gun and shoots his pursuers. The novel is unflinching in its depiction of slave auctions, whippings and the arbitrarily cruel nature of master-slave relationships. It makes most contemporary treatments of the subject look relatively tepid.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is extremely politically astute. Gates concedes that Stowe's familiarity with the international class and abolitionist debates of her time allowed her to "get inside another's head and speak in ways that are simultaneously believable and horrible." Her contrapuntal narrative shrewdly exposes slavery in a variety of aspects. As we journey through the travails of Eliza, George and Uncle Tom, we encounter slave owners who beat their slaves as well as the kind who "spoil" them—Stowe's point being that in either case the relationship kills the slaves' spirit and dignity.

Contemporary readers (white Southerners in particular) may be surprised that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not exclusively an attack on Southern society. Stowe was not oblivious to the racism of polite Northern society. Augustine St. Clare, the guilty Southern slave owner, convinces Miss Ophelia, who is visiting from New England, of the truth of his words: "You would not have them abused; but you don't want to have anything to do with them yourselves."

Nor is Uncle Tom an "Uncle Tom." He is a Christ symbol. This pivotal character needs to be understood both in the context of religious nineteenth-century America and Stowe's contrapuntal narrative. In the midst of this very violent book, the religious Uncle Tom is the calm at the eye of the storm: patient, tolerant, unwilling to use violence himself even when—a point conveniently overlooked—he approves of other slaves' decision to stage overt revolt. Uncle Tom encourages George and Eliza to flee. Knowing no other way of life, he chooses to resist the slave system by small acts of kindness and moral persuasion. The vast majority of American slaves would never flee their plantations. Stowe is contrasting two forms of resistance (which in many ways parallel the philosophical differences between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X): the Bible and the gun.

Yet *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has merits beyond that of a skillful piece of critical sociology. The real force of the book lies in its images. Many of Stowe's intellectualizations are easy to mock. Like most nineteenth-century writers—including white abolitionists—she habitually assigns her black characters "natural" abilities. She has no understanding that col-

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lective generalizations, however "positive," can be derogatory. Yet her images—her visualizations—are more complex than her intellectualizations.

There is a reason *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has fascinated illustrators. Stowe's abilities as an image-maker are priceless. This is also why in memory the novel easily fragments into isolated scenes: Eliza crossing the river of ice, Topsy's pranks, Uncle Tom's death.

Note the clever pairings of black and white imagery throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Many artists have been fascinated, in particular, by the friendship of the angelic Little Eva and her black mirror image, Topsy. Images like these—with their profound ambiguity—insinuate that blackness and whiteness are, in some sense that Stowe cannot quite grasp intellectually, dependent on each other. It may strike contemporary readers (it certainly struck me) that in her limited, faltering way Stowe hinted at what today we call the concept of race as a social construct.

Uncle Tom is also a remarkable image. He is the most overtly symbolic character in the novel—so much so that Stowe can never quite capture his physical reality. He is a kind of superman. Or, rather, a super-Christian. Stowe has overburdened Uncle Tom symbolically, but by the end of the novel her intentions are clear. Uncle Tom dies—Simon Legree whips him to death—for refusing to inform on the whereabouts of two escaped slaves. Uncle Tom is Stowe's black Christ.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's strength and weakness was that she wrote in broad strokes. Her universe consisted of representative characters who embodied the attitudes, politics and poetry of daily life in antebellum America. Because her archetypal images simultaneously fascinated and unnerved her audience—that is, because they struck home—the book became a staple of popular culture, and her archetypes were debased into stereotypes: the Good Slave, the Tragic Mulatto, the Cruel Slavemaster. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is deeply flawed, but it transcends these caricatures. While its intellectual content creaks, its images continue to haunt. ■

2006 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize

The Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize of $25,000, awarded annually for the most outstanding book of poems published in the United States by an American, is administered jointly by the Academy of American Poets and The Nation. *In the past decade, winners have been Anne Winters (2005), Donald Revell (2004), Eamon Grennan (2003), Madeline DeFrees (2002), Fanny Howe (2001), David Ferry (2000), Wanda Coleman (1999), Mark Jarman (1998), Robert Pinsky (1997) and Charles Wright (1996). This year the award goes to Eleanor Lerman for* Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds. *Jurors were Carl Dennis, Carol Muske-Dukes and Tony Hoagland, who contributed the following essay. Other finalists for the award were* The Singers I Prefer, *by Christian Barter (Cavan-Kerry);* Refusing Heaven, *by Jack Gilbert (Knopf);* Facts About the Moon, *by Dorianne Laux (Norton); and* The Incentive of the Maggot, *by Ron Slate (Mariner).*

Of late, American poetry has yielded some interesting species of "social" poetry—by which I mean poetry that engages the realities of the collective, as well as the emotional concerns of an individual speaker. There was Anne Winters's arresting collection *The Displaced of Capital* (the 2005 Lenore Marshall winner), which contains meticulous meditations on ATM machines and immigration. And Ron Slate's *The Incentive of the Maggot*, which opens with a jump-cutting, cinematic meditation-narrative about how the collapse of the Argentine peso conveniently coincides with the speaker's ability to buy a fine leather jacket. Both of those books, encountered by the casual reader of poetry, might transmit a shock, attending as they do not just to seismographic vibrations of inner being but to the riptides of the world at large and in particular. Winters and Slate possess a savvy regarding the wide world, and an appetite to understand it not commonly associated with the poet. Poet-MBAs, poet-economists: Are they our future?

Tony Hoagland is an award-winning poet. His works include Hard Rain, What Narcissism Means to Me, Donkey Gospel *and the essay collection* Real Sofistakashun.

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Of course, a rich tradition exists for social analysis in American poetry. The lineage includes Muriel Rukeyser, Louis Simpson, Adrienne Rich, C.K. Williams—these and many others have diagnosed the complicities of empire, the erosions of modern selfhood, the all-you-can-eat lotus blossom of consumer culture. Some of these poets are editorial, some are detached observers, some ironic rhapsodists. But new times require new tones, and some of the most recent work in poetry shows the possibility for innovative penetrations.

To the above list we now can add Eleanor Lerman, whose intriguing contribution is tonal. In the very title of her book, *Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds*, Lerman designates a context for the American self. It is a psychic twilight zone that exists in the wake of burst expectations, both historical and personal. Lerman's poems are set among shadows of events that didn't happen: the cold war that didn't become hot; the '60s awakening that went back to sleep; the reckoning that may be on its way. There's an eerie science-fiction atmosphere inside these monologues, as if set in a dystopian near future where we "private/citizens," with our lost faiths, are still functioning among the skyscrapers of late-stage capitalism, in stairwells and sublets, in lounges and office cubicles. But there is a furtive, anxious quality to our lives, and our expectations are more indefinite than ever.

Lerman is distinctly a baby boomer—born in 1952, raised in the milieu that mixed LSD and SDS, excess with idealistic overconfidence. Her first book, published in 1973, was titled *Armed Love*, and her new work retains some of the swagger of the postrevolutionary. "What else did you expect from the/braniacs of my generation?" she asks in her opening poem, "The survivors, the nonbelievers,/the oddballouts with the Cuban Missile Crisis still/sizzling in our blood?" Her work also betrays plenty of post-Aquarian irony, like the testimonial in "About Patti Boyd and Me": "I'm not complaining, Patti:/I survived it. I ate it when I had to, liked it when they said to./I killed it when there was nothing else to do."

Behind the tough stylish talk of the survivor can be heard a steady background hum of Absence—the absence of vision, the absence of large hopes. In "Starfish," the speaker takes the measure of such reduced expectations:

> This is what life does. It lets you walk
> up to
> the store to buy breakfast and the
> paper, on a
> stiff knee. It lets you choose the way
> you have
> your eggs, your coffee. Then it sits a
> fisherman
> down beside you at the counter who
> says, *Last night,*
> *the channel was full of starfish.* And you
> wonder,
> is this a message, finally, or just another
> day?

Here, tone is all: a voice whose flat reserve is not exactly scornful of the offerings of daily life but hardly giddy, a tone against which that word "finally," with its wary hopefulness, sounds especially poignant. But *Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds* is not a book of nostalgia for the bygone—often what one feels in the poems is dark presentiment, the approach of something large and impending. Lerman isn't joking. One poem is titled "Why We Took the Coastal Evacuation Route." Another, "Sunset Hammers," anticipates and predicts the nameless emergency:

> When the phone rings in your office,
> receive the news
> as calmly as you would another memo.
> Another inventory.
> Sheet detailing cost and value. *The price*
> *of the goods*
> *we have in stock is fluctuating. The*
> *physical integrity*
> *of the materials is of concern.* And as
> calmly as you
> would write an answer (*then stabilize*
> *the prices: restate*
> *our faith in the process and manufacture*)
> get your
> coat and get out the door. Your
> colleagues will remain
>
> at their stations: behind their business
> of blue eyes the
> phone will go on ringing and must be
> answered. Even
> with faith, with planning, there is just
> no other way.
> And so. Go into the city of tunnels. Of
> bridges, of
> elevated light...

Lerman's poems move most often by litany; their style is the flat declarative, emotionally muted but telegrammatic with knowingness. Pushiness is one of the delights of this poetry. There is a dash, too, of New York School brio, urban verbosity, the self-celebration of the streetwise. It is a mode not above trashing its own pieties, as in the poem "The Anthropic Principle":

> ...Russia awaits,
> Africa, the prevention of nuclear war.
> If I were free, I would
> suggest that this is how we do it: more
> sports, more food.

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Certainly, more television. Ducks in
funny costumes, wielding
hammers, quacking out a song. That's
how we conquered
Communism: the ducks alone brought
down the Berlin wall.

In the wake of deflowered ideals, after the downsizing of heroic individualism, intimacy is the only remaining salvation. "Come near," she says in "The Causeway." "The day is closing down. Dinner is/burning, the eternal is proving to be temporary, the/divine is showing signs of being cruel. So come near." Finally, *Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds* is not a manifesto, nor a history, but a tight-lipped spunky report from the indefinite front. It says the situation has degraded, comrade, but we persist.

Yet good poetry will contradict itself, and another kind of moment, too, pops up in *Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds*. Such moments erupt in "Starfish," "The Mayans" and "Tales of the Mohawk Valley," another of Lerman's "Escape From Manhattan" genre, a poem in which political realism is trumped by a more cosmic perspective. In "Tales of the Mohawk Valley" the speaker claims that liberty is still out there (or in there):

At the end of the valley there is a lake
with a monster who lives in a deep,
cold pool.
That can be our destination..../We will
blend in with the
tourists, be indistinguishable from
people with money and plans and
things to do.
We will ride a boat that glides above the
monster's house and
speculate with strangers: *How do you
think he makes his living?*
*How has he survived so long, unknown,
unseen, and free?*

One doesn't have to be a Jungian to feel the promise imaged here that alternative truths exist, that there are realms of permission outside history. Eleanor Lerman's poems have sociological savvy, philosophical rue, historical recognition and vernacular resilience. They sing a song that is bravely gloomy, but they sing it with a fierce and earned dignity. If a strong voice is a blueprint for living, these poems could be said to harbor and defend the old sanctum of poetry, private life—our not-so-secret right to think what we want, and feel for ourselves.

Essay by Tony Hoagland

That Sure Is My Little Dog

Yes, indeed, that is my house that I am carrying around
on my back like a bullet-proof shell and yes, that sure is
my little dog walking a hard road in hard boots. And
just wait until you see my girl, chomping on the chains
of fate with her mouth full of jagged steel. She's damn
ready and so am I. What else did you expect from the
braniacs of my generation? The survivors, the nonbelievers,
the oddball-outs with the Cuban Missile Crisis still
sizzling in our blood? Don't tell me that you bought
our act, just because our worried parents (and believe me,
we're nothing like them) taught us how to dress for work
and to speak as if we cared about our education. And
I guess the music fooled you: you thought we'd keep
the party going even to the edge of the abyss. Well,
too bad. It's all yours now. Good luck on the ramparts.
What you want to watch for is when the sky shakes
itself free of kites and flies away. Have a nice day.

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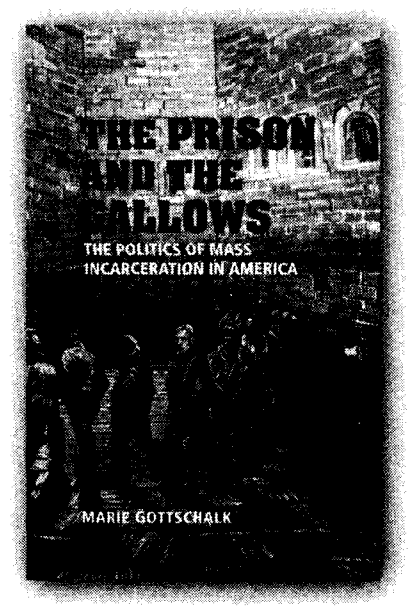

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The Bondage Club

In the morning we put on our sharp blue suits and
go to hear the delegates speak through broken teeth.
These are the women whose names the press must be
cautioned not to mention, the ones who smuggle food
across warring borders, drive defiant crosses into the
burning ground. We give them our attention, we
write them checks. And yet we are not ashamed to
live here in our bounty. It is ours. It is what we have.

In the evening, you put on your black, your gold, and
go out to the bondage club. Little thing that you are, I
understand the need to slap someone around. The need
for photographs and scars. And you say these are the nicest
people you've ever met: they're just in pain (oh yes, a little
joke: I refer to the physical as well as the psychic). Little
thing that you are, come home when you have had enough.
I will apply the universal remedy. Perhaps serve tea.

And when the next day comes around, I'll be the bad
girl. You go to work, I'll hit the bars. Let's put it this
way: peace is impossible, violence endemic, guilt the
natural foundation of our lives. *Our* lives. Oh, the years
I spent researching magical solutions! Page 309: *In
the moonlight, in a bloody dance.* We could try that,
too. It won't work, but it might be our kind of fun.

Rogue states, rogue lives: all women suffer. All women
search the empty marketplace, live on morsels, learn to
be light sleepers in uneasy beds. Little thing that you are,
pay the madman and apologize for nothing: No matter what
you do, the years rage on through all their seasons of pain;
I will be satisfied when you are satisfied, which means that
I must watch you take your chances. Save you from all
the ghosts and ancestors who think there is another way.

The Mayans

The scowl is caught in jadeite.
The flattened face on a green bead
displayed in the orchestral light of the museum
also boards the train on Steinway Street.
The warriors are going to the factories.
They sew and sew, these little people.
They sew themselves into oblivion
while our health towers over them.
Our honey, our nutritious breads, our Europe.

I say that history is a heavy stone in that museum,
A golden block that nobody can move.
It is the weight that locks the ossuary,
The brute strength of the altar stone in fine Italian chapels.
It breaks the sword of every century, splitting the jewels like candy
that even starving children are afraid to eat.

I say that all of history is frightening. It deserves
to be boxed up and viewed from behind steel chains.
For think of this: how history has harmed us.
Think how it will not change.
For every kindness we have paid with an extinction.
See that star exploding? It is history, hammering at our heads.

So kings, princes, eater of hearts—
This is what I want to ask you:
If our Christ were reborn and walked among us
whispering that last secret into our fearful ears,
would you be beaten? Would you submit?
Or could you find your way back to the ball courts,
restore the ruined planetarium,
and calculate, from sacred zero,
all the formulas time has denied?

Little Mayans, European blondes—
let us follow the route of the thunderbird that
flies before the storm,
Let us toss the ball,
Let us outwit history,
At last, at last, let our game begin,

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The Anthropic Principle

Two red drinks—pure alcohol, with a maraschino cherry—in
the bar next door, deep in the afternoon. While I hide in my
cool corner, admiring the sawdust and the sides of beef, work
is taking place all over the world: diamonds are being quarried,
slaves are sewing dresses, policemen are loading their rifles,
aiming their guns. As for the rest of us (when we're not
drinking), diligently, we apply ourselves to solving the
problems of the multitudes; diligently, we communicate

our ideas. And here is more to chew on: seventeen rich
grandchildren are coming for lunch tomorrow. Russia awaits,
Africa, the prevention of nuclear war. If I were free, I would
suggest that this is how we do it: more sports, more food.
Certainly, more television. Ducks in funny costumes, wielding
hammers, quacking out a song. That's how we conquered
Communism: the ducks alone brought down the Berlin wall.

So three drinks later, back in the office, I blast fax out my
manifesto, which is simple: we should all relax. Apparently,
no matter what we do, we already do our part; we balance
the cosmological constant just by getting up in the morning
and smacking around our wives. Isn't that amazing! And
here's how it works: according to the anthropic principle,

there could be an infinity of universes: starry bubbles, burning
balls, solid boxes of hard time. You name it and they made it:
some are gelatinous. Some are inside out. But there is one
commonality: none are peopled. None have us. Only the
composition of our universe allows for our existence—in fact,
our presence is required or the whole thing falls apart. So

here's what I think: what if we all held our breath and stood
sideways in a corner so we couldn't be found? Our universe
would go wailing through the empty corridors of physics, knocking
over furniture and pictures, searching for its vanished friends.
Afterward, when we said *Gotcha!* and the universe wept with
relief, we could all sit down for a nice cup of something comfy,
have a heart-to-heart, and someone, somewhere, might wise up.

All poems from Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds
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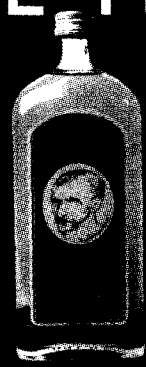

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EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 22)

I thank F. Ross Peterson for bringing attention to Costa Rica's innovative and exciting children's vote program. Wouldn't it be grand if we had universal voter registration and civic education?

Frank Hammer is right to be impressed with the level of political participation by Brazilians of all walks of life. But I think the key to Brazil's multiparty democracy is proportional representation, not the runoff rule.

To Kevin Kuhne and others who don't want an election day holiday: It is noteworthy that Puerto Rico, which has such a holiday, is consistently among the highest in voter turnout.

Gareth Davidson's preferential voting is IRV. I resist the idea of compulsory voting, but there are many who believe it would address the fact that the majority party in this country remains the party of nonvoters.

I'm for Fred Warren's idea of limiting the length of elections. The 2006 midterm cost about $2.8 billion! Think of the good even a fraction of that money could have done elsewhere.

I worry that Pat Healy's requirement that a candidate win 55 percent of the vote and that a certain percent must vote before an election can be considered legitimate would lead to repeat runoffs—and a drop in turnout!

Ralph Brock was one of several who argued that the right to vote does exist in our Constitution. A right to vote is, of course, implied. But it's not explicitly declared and does not exist at the presidential level. The Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore* stated, "The individual citizen has no federal constitutional right to vote for electors for the President of the United States." The vote is not a universal right protected by the federal government. It is a right that states decide how to protect and interpret (very differently) across our 7,800 or so election districts. If we had a constitutional right to vote, we'd have a basis for suing states for equal protection of people's right to vote. The lack of a constitutional right to vote explains why the courts didn't order Washington, DC, to have voting representation in Congress, why states deny the right to vote to some 5 million citizens who have committed felonies, and why we can have such ridiculously badly run elections without accountability.

I should have mentioned that Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. is the intellectual architect and longtime proponent of a constitutional right to vote (see his HJR 28 and his lucid explanation of its importance in our pages, "The Right to Vote," February 6).

It is heartening to hear from so many decent people who agree that America needs a democracy reconstruction project. Let's stop lecturing the world and set an example by how we care for, renew and modernize our "old" democracy here in America.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

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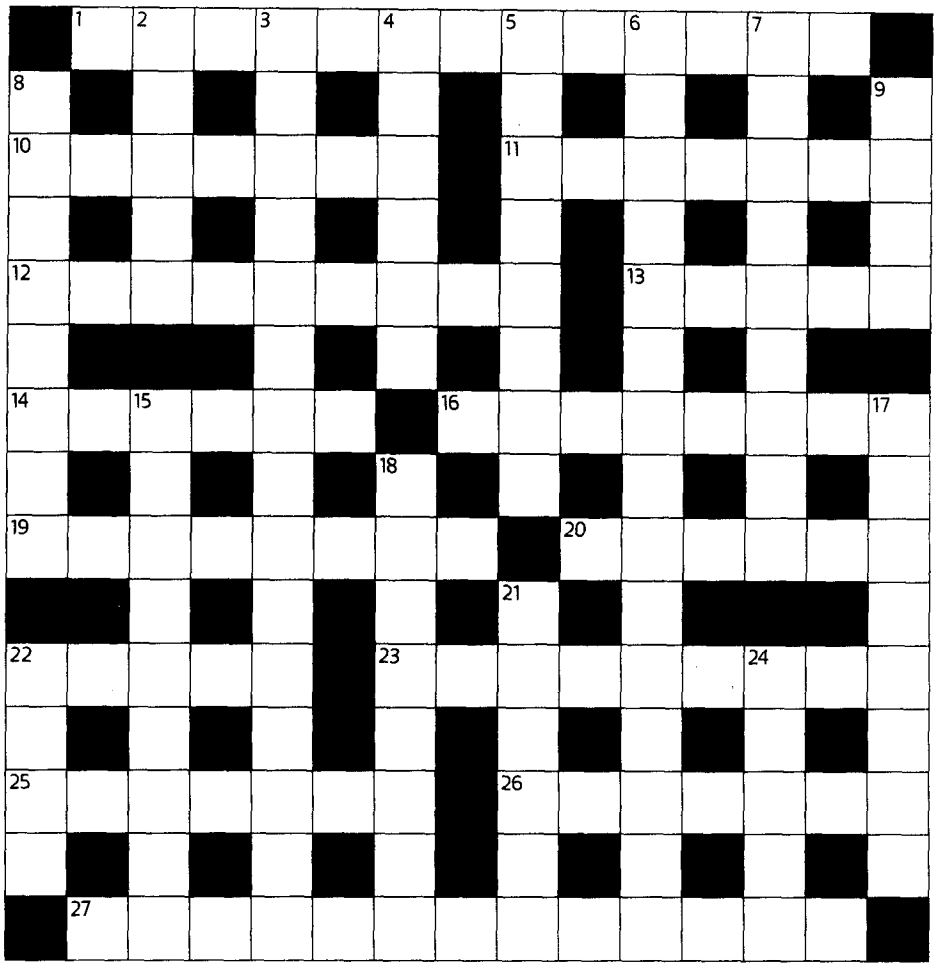

ACROSS

1 How Hitler behaved with such as Mussolini, having one friend, at least. (13)

10 Relating to the tendency of a fluid to pass through is nothing most unusual, as one hears, "I see!" (7)

11 To write the wrong way, carrying the melody, is suitable for a god! (7)

12 Working on the lawn is like going back, one hears. (9)

13 Snake found in the summer? (5)

14 Like to make a picture back inside? Prizes given for such. (6)

16 A follower is at this place, and mistaken about it going to the junction. (8)

19 Balfe's girl is far from conventional. (8)

20 Passes on the Spanish fuel? (6)

22 Sign up when roles are made to show it. (5)

23 Very dry, with a curly tail on your head? Such behavior is beastly! (9)

25 Grown-up cradle to push back and forth? It's basic! (7)

26 It comes out regularly, but you could get to die in it. (7)

27 Close relationship, but the prisoner confessed to one in unity! (13)

DOWN

2 This person exists, to a degree, with feet that go "de-dah, de-dah," etc. (5)

3 One who does a certain kind of needlework, made incorrectly, gets one in the den, possibly. How sloppy can they get! (15)

4 Two-thirds of the game are reversed, which is just a maneuver. (6)

5 You have to get sort of green to take little notice at one point. (One changes sides, supposedly.) (8)

6 It involves putting all your important letters in order. (15)

7 The French bare all, according to the cleaning lady. (9)

8 Where you come in to preserve the beginning of beginning—at least part of where you come in. (8)

9 Some say it once and again, in approval. (4)

15 Take little notice at this place, with a dot wrongly put on when you get stuck. (7,2)

17 Counting the votes may be described as a big order for Yang's partner—$1,000! (8)

18 Hide relatives of Mary's follower? (8)

21 Place where it takes a month to get to the French? (6)

22 What do you get in Napoleon's place? Bale out! (4)

24 One who takes delight in getting a card game? How dumb! (5)

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"A few weeks ago, my niece showed me her new cell phone. It was the size of a business card, had more keys than a typewriter, and it played video, music, and could pull up stock quotes. She was so proud, but all I could think was…I could never use that phone! All I want is the ability to check in with my friends and family and to call 911 if there's an emergency. I thought, why can't someone make a cell phone like that? And then I learned about Jitterbug OneTouch. What a lifesaver – finally, I can be in touch all the time."

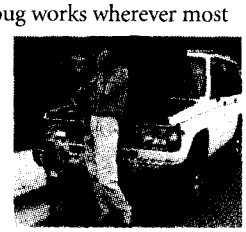
For people like me, who want the ease of making emergency and personal calls with the touch of a button. Over the years, cell phones have become smaller and smaller with so many complicated features. The problem is many of us just want the ability to call 911 in case of an emergency and check in from time to time with friends and family. I've heard my friends complain about the cell phones their well-meaning kids bought or gave them. They even program in some numbers to try to help. But my friends never use those phones – or even turn them on for that matter! They're just too confusing to use and difficult to hear and see.

Simple to use and reliable. Open the OneTouch and you actually hear a dial tone that tells you you're good to go. With only three buttons to dial, it's really quite simple. *OPERATOR* calls the Jitterbug operator, available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, who connects you right away with friends, family members, your towing service, or any other number you'd like to call. Your personal phone list is preloaded on your phone so you're ready to use your phone when it arrives. It's just that easy. *MY CHOICE* connects you with the one number you call most often and we preset that for you as well. *911* makes sure you have quick access to emergency service whenever you need it. And, what makes Jitterbug really special is the phone's soft ear cushion that reduces background noise so you can actually hear the person who's talking. The design is stylish yet practical– it rests so comfortably on your ear just like your home phone and the display is easy to read. Finally, reliability is key; Jitterbug works wherever most cellular service is available so, whether you make or receive calls, the connection is clear as a bell.

The new Jitterbug™ makes calling simple!

- Phone arrives with phone numbers preprogrammed, so it's ready to use
- One touch access to a Jitterbug operator, a number of your choice and 911
- Large bright easy-to-see display and buttons
- Push "Yes" to call directly from personal phone list
- Soft ear cushion and louder volume for better sound quality
- Hearing aid compatible
- Familiar dial tone confirms service
- Service as low as $10 a month*
- Access help wherever you go

Service as low as $10 a month and a 30-day free trial*. If you've ever wanted the security and convenience of a cell phone, but never wanted the fancy features and minutes you don't need…Jitterbug OneTouch is for you. Like me, you'll soon be telling your friends about Jitterbug. Call now…this product is not available in stores!



Also available in a 12 button dial phone

Jitterbug™ Cell Phone Item# BU-4722
Call now for our lowest price.
Plus get a FREE Car Charger– valued at $24
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*Not including government taxes, assessment surcharges and activation fee.
**Applies to phone only, provided talk time usage is fewer than 30 minutes. Usage charges may apply.

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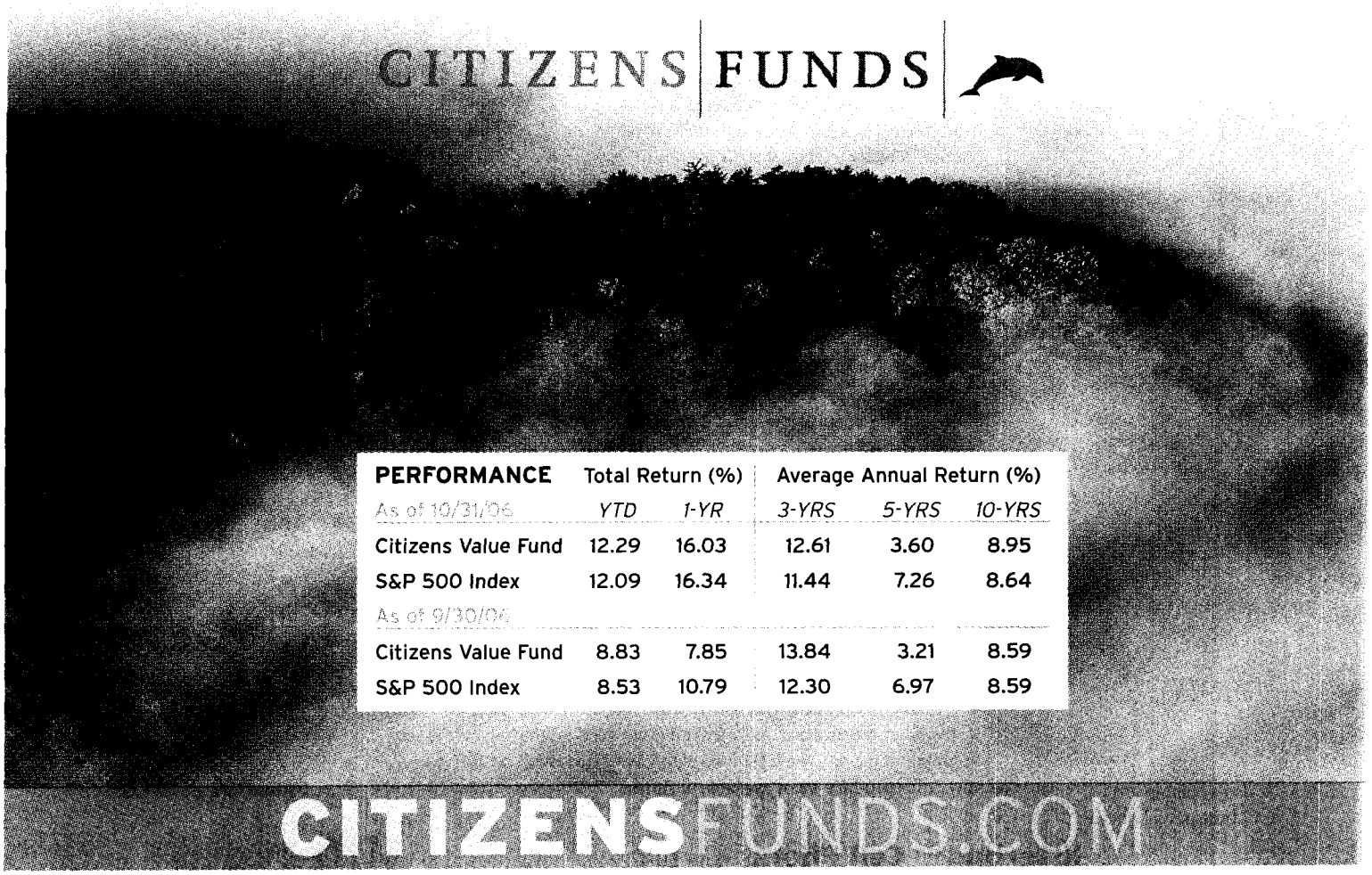

PERFORMANCE	Total Return (%)		Average Annual Return (%)		
As of 10/31/06	YTD	1-YR	3-YRS	5-YRS	10-YRS
Citizens Value Fund	12.29	16.03	12.61	3.60	8.95
S&P 500 Index	12.09	16.34	11.44	7.26	8.64
As of 9/30/06					
Citizens Value Fund	8.83	7.85	13.84	3.21	8.59
S&P 500 Index	8.53	10.79	12.30	6.97	8.59

Data presented reflects past performance, which is no guarantee of future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data quoted. Performance data current to the most recent month end may be obtained online at www.citizensfunds.com. Performance data includes that of the Meyers Pride Value Fund, established on June 13, 1996 (fund's inception date), which contributed its portfolio securities in exchange for Standard shares of Citizens Value Fund on September 24, 2001. The investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. The investment adviser has agreed to contractually limit fees and expenses through June 30, 2007, without which returns would have been lower. The S&P 500 Index is an unmanaged index comprised of 500 common stocks chosen for market size, liquidity and industry group representation. Direct investment cannot be made in this index

Please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses of Citizens Funds carefully before investing. For this and other information, please call 800.223.7010 or visit www.citizensfunds.com for a free prospectus and read it carefully before investing. *Distributed by Citizens Securities, Inc.*

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